Seventh-day Adventist Trinity Theology
(what it is, and what it is not)

by

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A study of the trinity doctrine as currently espoused by the Seventh-day Adventist church showing the implications of its theology with respect to the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is as opposed to the theology of early Seventh-day Adventists that necessitated a rejection of trinity theology.

The Value of Redemption

"In order to realize the value of redemption, it is necessary to understand what it cost. We should take broader and deeper views of the life, sufferings, and death of God's dear Son. A limited idea of the sacrifice made in our behalf leads many to place a low estimate upon the great work of the atonement.

The glorious plan of man's salvation is a manifestation of the infinite love of God the Father. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The love of God in giving his Son to die for a fallen race, amazed the holy angels." *(Ellen G. White, Present Truth (British), 19th November 1885, 'The Sufferings of Christ')*

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“Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding.”
Proverbs 23:23

Misunderstandings

Within the Seventh-day Adventist Church today there are those who would have us believe that Ellen White, because she referred to the Holy Spirit as the "third person of the Godhead" *(Special Testimonies for Ministers and Workers No. 10, page 37)*, also because she said there are "three living persons of the heavenly trio" (*Special Testimonies, Series B, No.7, page 63*), was promoting trinity theology. In further pursuit of their objective, they also refer to other of her statements where she says that the Holy Spirit is a person. In so doing, they attempt to have our present-day church members believe that not only did God's messenger look with favour upon trinity theology, but that she herself was a trinitarian. As we shall see later, nothing could be further from the truth.

The unfortunate part of this is that those who are doing these things, very rarely, if ever, point out that on 100's of other occasions she referred to the Holy Spirit as an "it" - and this was ***after*** saying "it" is a person. Those who withhold this information, even though they may be well-intentioned, give an unbalanced, one-sided view, of what she wrote.

There are also those who believe and teach that just because some early SDAs used the word *trinity*, also because some referred to the Holy Spirit as a person (or a being), then they too must have been trinitarian – which as we shall see later is just superficial reasoning. There are also those amongst us who would have us believe that our (SDA) trinity doctrine is completely different to that of Roman Catholic trinity orthodoxy.

Unfortunately, all of the above reasoning, which in reality is simply misunderstandings, has greatly contributed to the ever-increasing confusion that exists today, within our denomination, over this trinity issue. It is these misunderstandings that led me to write this article.

In this article I will show exactly what constitutes trinitarianism. I will also show that trinity theology is not, as some believe, solely dependent on the belief that the Holy Spirit is a person. I will also show that to a very great extent, present-day SDA trinity theology is no different to that of Roman Catholic trinity orthodoxy. This article will also explain why the SDA Church, for the first 100 years or so of its existence as God's remnant church, was a non-trinitarian denomination.

Before doing any of this though I would like to share with you the beginning of my involvement in this trinity controversy. I would like to explain why, after many years of referring to myself as a trinitarian, I suddenly stopped doing so. This will explain a great deal about trinitarian theology. It will also explain why, as a member of the SDA Church for almost 50 years, I take the stand that I do today against this teaching. As will be seen, I believe it destroys the gospel. As this document is read, my reasons for making such a claim – which to some may appear somewhat radical - will become very clear.

My earnest prayer is that what I have written will be of benefit to you the reader, also that it may serve to enrich your Christian experience. God bless you as you read on.

Beginnings

When I became a member of the SDA Church at the age of 32 over 48 years ago, I held two beliefs that were very precious to me. First and foremost was the belief that 2000 years ago at a place called Calvary, the person of the divine Son of God died to pay the penalty for my sins. My second belief, which was as dear to me as the first, was that in the making of the decision for the divine Son of God to become incarnate, a risk was taken concerning His eternal existence. I believed, and still do. that if the incarnate Christ had sinned, which was possible, He would have been lost for eternity. My entire Christian experience was centred around these two beliefs. They showed me just how far God was willing to go to secure my salvation, which, in turn, showed me just how much He loved me. I reasoned that if He was willing to go to this extent, then His love for me must be incalculable. So it was that I became endeared to both God and His Son.

At the same time as this though, I also confessed to be a trinitarian. This was because I not only believed that all three persons of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were God – which I still believe today – but that in itself, this constituted trinitarianism. My main reason though for referring to myself as a trinitarian was my misunderstanding that unless I confessed 'the trinity', it would be a denial that Christ was divine. This I have found is the reasoning of many Christians – even present-day SDAs.

There is also of course the stigma attached to not professing to believe the trinity doctrine. Christians of most denominations tend to 'look down upon' those who do not profess it. This is why, even without understanding what constitutes trinity theology, many insist on calling themselves trinitarian. They cannot bear the 'shame' of not being known as a trinitarian.

Unfortunately, it was not until the year 2000 that I first became aware of what really did constitute trinitarianism. Only then did I realise that the two beliefs I held (that I have just mentioned above) are not possible in trinity theology. This is why they are not believed by trinitarians.

Up to that time I had been quite ignorant of what was involved in trinity theology – even though for many years I had been referring to myself as a trinitarian. This is why, from the time I became aware of what was involved in this teaching, I refrained from calling myself such. It was not because I had changed my beliefs as such. It was simply because by referring to myself as a trinitarian, I was not being honest, and once I understood what constituted trinity theology, I had no desire to be associated with it.

When I first began to study this trinity issue, it did not surprise me that SDAs in general found difficulty in believing that a divine person, possessing immortality, could go out of existence, but I was shocked to realise that SDA ministers, as trinitarians, did not believe that a divine person had died at Calvary. This took me quite a while to accept, but in the finality, I had no choice but to accept it. It is what trinitarians believe.

So what is SDA trinity theology, and how does it differ from orthodox (Roman Catholic) trinity theology – if it does differ as some would like us to believe? In order to answer this question, we shall now take a look at these two theologies. This will serve to shed light upon some of the misunderstandings that exist today, regarding this trinity issue, within our denomination.

SDA and orthodox (Roman Catholic) trinity theology

In the section of the Catechism of the RC Church dealing with the Profession of Faith of Roman Catholics with respect to the trinity doctrine, the following is stated:

> "266 "Now this is the Catholic faith: We worship one God in the Trinity and the Trinity in unity, without either confusing the persons or dividing the substance; for the person of the Father is one, the Son's is another, the Holy Spirit's another; but the Godhead of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is one, their glory equal, their majesty coeternal" (Athanasian Creed: DS 75; ND 16).
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> 267 Inseparable in what they are, the divine persons are also inseparable in what they do." *(Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church, Profession of Faith, No.'s 266 & 267)*

This is in keeping with the Creed of Toledo (AD 675) that today is still held in very high esteem by the Roman Catholic Church. Regarding the trinity it says (which is in keeping with the creeds of Nicaea and Constantinople):

> "Hence, we recognise the Trinity in the distinction of persons and we profess the unity on account of the nature or substance. Thus, the three are one by nature, not as person. Nevertheless these three persons are not to be considered separable since, according to our belief, none of them ever existed or acted before another, after another, without another. For they are inseparable both in what they are and in what they do…" *(Creed of Telado, Eleventh Council of Toledo, AD 675)*

In RC orthodoxy, the three persons of the trinity, namely the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are all said to have existed eternally in the one indivisible substance of God, as the one God, also, because together they constitute the one God, they are deemed inseparable.

Here now, as explained by our church theologians, is how we, over the years as SDAs, have described our belief that the one God of the Bible is a trinity (tri-unity) of divine beings as depicted by the trinity doctrine. As will be seen, there is no difference between what we confess, as a denomination, and Roman Catholic orthodoxy (as seen above). These statements can be considered as being from 'official' sources (from hereon, all highlighting in red is my emphasis).

> "Trinitarianism is the orthodox belief that there is but one living and true God. Nevertheless this one God is a unity of three persons, who are of one substance, power and eternity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." *(Gerhard Pfandl, Associate Director, Seventh-day Adventist Biblical Research Institute, 'The Doctrine of the Trinity among Adventists', 1999)*

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> "Briefly defined, the doctrine of the Trinity stands for the concept that "God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and there is one God." *(Gerhard Pfandl, Associate Director, Biblical Research Institute, 'The Trinity in Scripture', June 1999)*

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"In Scripture God has revealed His transcendent nature as Trinity, namely three distinct divine Persons who act directly and historically in history and constituting the one divine trinitarian being." *(Dr Fernando Canale, Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology, SDA Bible Commentary series, Volume 12, page 138, 2000)*

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"The three persons of the Trinity, however, must be inclusive and not independent of one another. Because there is but one true God, by nature we have to conclude that He is plural as to persons but single as to substance." *(Max Hatton, 'Understanding the Trinity', page 20, 2001)*

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"There is only one God (Deut. 6:4), however, Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all called God (Matthew 27:46, John 20:28: Acts 5:3-4). Consequently, we do not worship three Gods, but one God who reveals Himself in and consists of three "persons". The three persons share one indivisible nature. Each person of the Godhead is by nature and essence God, and the fullness of the deity dwells in each of them. On the other hand, each person of the Godhead is inseparably connected to the other two." *(Ekkehardt Mueller, Biblical Research Institute, Reflections newsletter, July 2008, Page 8, 'Scripture Applied, - A Bible Study')*

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"The core elements of the doctrine of the Trinity are oneness and distinctiveness. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one, yet three. To express this conviction, words and expressions came into use that are not explicitly used in the Bible. The oneness of God we confess by claiming that God is one in being; the distinctiveness we confess by teaching that there are three persons." *(Paul Petersen, Andrews University, May 2015, page 3, 'God in 3 Persons — in the New Testament')*

All these statements are said to explain our Fundamental Belief No 2, which, in our church manual, states under the heading of *The Trinity:*

"There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three coeternal Persons. God is immortal, all-powerful, all-knowing, above all, and ever present. He is infinite and beyond human comprehension, yet known through His self-revelation. God, who is love, is forever worthy of worship, adoration, and service by the whole creation. (Gen. 1:26; Deut. 6:4; Isa. 6:8; Matt. 28:19; John 3:16; 2 Cor. 1:21, 22; 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Peter 1:2.) *(The 2015 SDA Church Manual, 'Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists', page 162)*

On the website of the SDA Biblical Research Institute (BRI), there is an article called *Seventh-day Adventists: A Brief Introduction to their Beliefs*. George W. Reid, then Director of the institute (1984-2001), wrote the article. It is described as

"A brief review of the history and doctrines of the SDA church. Prepared for the dialogue with representatives of the Roman Catholic Church."

Notice it says, "the dialogue", denoting a specific dialogue – which, when this was written in 2000, could be past or future. Nothing more is said about this dialogue. In this article, after detailing our beliefs, Reid then says with respect to the doctrine of God (the trinity)

> "A reading of the above statements will show that with respect to their doctrine of God Seventh-day Adventists are in harmony with the great creedal statements of Christendom, including the Apostles' Creed, Nicea 325), and the additional definition of faith concerning the Holy Spirit as reached in Constantinople (381)." *(George Reid, Seventh-day Adventists: A Brief Introduction to their Beliefs, 2000)*

It was at Nicaea (AD 325), and Constantinople (AD 381), where the trinity doctrine was first officially formulated. This is still the basis for all RC trinity theology.

The above article, also its description, can be found at the following link where George Reid's articles are itemised.

> https://www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/materials/?_author=george-w-reid

On the BRI website, there is also an article by the late Raoul Dederen Ph.D. (1925-2016). He was professor emeritus of systematic theology, and dean of the SDA Theological Seminary, Berrien Springs. In this article called *Reflections on the Doctrine of the Trinity*, he explains

> "Therefore, we must confess that the Trinity is one indivisible God and that the distinctions of the persons do not destroy the divine unity. This unity of God is expressed by saying that he is one substance. Nevertheless, in the divine unity there are three co-eternal and co-equal persons, who, though distinct, are the One undivided and adorable God. This is the doctrine of Scripture." *(Raoul Dederen, Reflections on the Doctrine of the Trinity, page 16, Andrews University Seminar Studies, 1970)*

As we have seen, present-day SDA trinity theology is the same as that of RC orthodoxy. They both say that the one God of the Bible is a trinity (a tri-unity) of three co-eternal divine persons, who exist inseparably together, in the one indivisible substance of God. This is trinitarianism. No other belief, no matter how it is expressed, constitutes trinitarianism. A trinity doctrine must contain both *threeness* and *oneness*.

A Roman Catholic and a SDA admission

You may not have heard of Edmund J. Fortman (1901-1992), but in his time he was a well-known Roman Catholic Jesuit theologian and teacher. Not surprisingly, he adored the trinity doctrine. In fact he wrote a book called *The Triune God*. It is a classic piece of writing. Needless to say, he wrote it in support of the trinity doctrine. In his book, Fortman asks what do the Old Testament scriptures tell us of God. His answer, surprising as it may seem to some, was

> "It tells us there is one God, a wonderful God of life and love and righteousness and power and glory and mystery, who is the creator and lord of the whole universe, who is intensely concerned with the tiny people of Israel. It tells us of His Word, Wisdom. Spirit, of the Messiah He will send, of a Son of Man and a Suffering Servant to come. But it tells us nothing explicitly or by necessary implication of a Triune God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit." *(Edmund J. Fortman, The Triune God, Introduction, page XV, 1972)*

Even as an avid supporter of the trinity doctrine, Fortman is honest enough to admit that nowhere in the Old Testament does it even imply, let alone explicitly say, that God is a trinity of divine persons as expressed by the trinity doctrine. He also says much the same regarding the New Testament scriptures.

> "If we take the New Testament writers together they tell us there is only one God, the creator and lord of the universe, who is the Father of Jesus. They call Jesus the Son of God, Messiah, Lord, Savior, Word, Wisdom. They assign Him the divine functions of creation, salvation, judgment. Sometimes they call Him God explicitly." *(ibid)*

He then says of what the New Testament writers say of the Holy Spirit

> "They do not speak as fully and clearly of the Holy Spirit as they do of the Son, but at times they coordinate Him with the Father and the Son and put Him on a level with them as far as divinity and personality are concerned." *(ibid)*

Again this is being very honest – and very true. The scriptures are not as informative concerning the Holy Spirit as they are of the Son. This is probably why, over the centuries, there has been so many disputes regarding it. In fact in the 11th century, this was one of the causes of the 'great schism' between Eastern and Western Christianity (the Filioque clause). Fortman concludes therefore

> "There is no formal doctrine of the Trinity in the New Testament writers, if this means an explicit teaching that in one God there are three co-equal divine beings" *(ibid, Chapter 2, 'The New Testament Witness to God', page 32)*

On page 35 of his book, Fortman ultimately draws this conclusion (which again may surprise some Christians)

> "The Biblical witness to God, as we have seen, did not contain any formal or formulated doctrine of the trinity, any explicit teaching that in one God there are three co-equal divine persons. Rather it contained the data from which a doctrine of this kind could be formulated. And it would take three centuries of gradual assimilation of the Biblical witness to God before the formulation of the dogma of one God in three distinct persons would be achieved." *(ibid, 'The Triune God in the Early Christian Church', page 35)*

Probably, this is what Fortman would have said, as do many Christians, about Sunday keeping and the immortality of the soul – meaning that when the Biblical data regarding these beliefs is collated, it shows these teachings to be correct. As we know though, as SDAs, they are not correct. It is just a case therefore of what data is used, and what data is not used, also how the revealed data is interpreted – and of course, what is added that cannot be found in Scripture. This is the same as it is with the doctrine of the trinity.

What Fortman means by saying "three centuries of gradual assimilation of the Biblical witness to God" is that it was not until the 4th century of the Christian era that the church 'officially' formulated the trinity doctrine. This came about through the Council of Nicaea in AD 325, also the Council of Constantinople in AD 381. This was when it was deemed that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit were of one divine indivisible substance, therefore constituted the 'one God' of the Bible. The point though that Fortman was emphasising, and should not be missed, is,

> "The Biblical witness to God, as we have seen, did not contain any formal or formulated doctrine of the trinity, any explicit teaching that in one God there are three co-equal divine persons" *(ibid)*

That is honesty for you, even though his conclusion from his study of the biblical data (that the one God of the Bible is triune as depicted by the trinity doctrine) may not be considered acceptable theology.

Very interestingly, Richard Rice, Professor of Religion at Loma Linda University (now retired), wrote in his 1985 book *The Reign of God, An Introduction to Christian Theology from a Seventh-day Adventist Perspective*

> "The role of the trinity in a doctrine of God always raises questions. One reason is that the word itself does not appear in the Bible, nor is there any clear statement of the idea. But the Bible does set the stage for its formulation, and the concept represents a development of biblical claims and concepts. So even though the doctrine of the trinity is not part of what the Bible itself says about God, it is part of what the church must say to safeguard the biblical view of God**."** *(Richard Rice, The Reign of God, An Introduction to Christian Theology from a Seventh-day Adventist Perspective', page 89, 'A constructive proposal', 1985)*

This is the same in principle as what was said by Edmund Fortman (see above). This is that in the Bible there is no "clear statement of the idea" that God is a trinity of persons as depicted by the trinity doctrine, but it is what the church must say to depict how God is revealed in the Bible. On the next page, Richard Rice wrote

> "We can find hints of this doctrine in the Old Testament and preliminary expressions of it in the new. *(ibid, page 90)*

Again this is admitting, as did Fortman, that the trinity doctrine cannot be found in Scripture. All that can be found there, according to Rice, are "hints" and "preliminary expressions". Then, after quoting several passages that speak of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the same author wrote the following

> "As these passages indicate, the idea of the trinity has precedents in the Bible, even though a full-fledged doctrine of the trinity is not to be found there." (*ibid*)

Again this is admitting that the trinity doctrine cannot be found in the Bible. It could be reasoned that Rice had read Fortman's book. Their remarks are so very similar.

Even in the *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (published in the year 2000), which is an official explanation of our denominational Fundamental beliefs, Dr. Fernando Canale, who wrote the treatise *Doctrine of God* that explains our trinity belief No. 2, freely admits

> "The concept of the Trinity, namely the idea that the three are one, is not explicitly stated but only assumed." *(Dr. Fernando L. Canale, Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology, Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia Volume 12, page 138, 'Doctrine of God')*

The above admittances should make us very wary of accepting such a teaching as the trinity doctrine. It is vital that for whatever we believe, we should always have a *thus saith the Lord*.

Confusion upon confusion

Within the SDA Church today there are those who are causing confusion over what constitutes trinity theology. They are saying that if it is believed that the Holy Spirit is a person, thus professing the belief that there is a group of three divine persons, that this constitutes trinitarianism. This though is incorrect. In fact this particular profession of belief (a group of three persons), if not accompanied by an explanation, could be interpreted as tritheism, which is a belief in three separate gods. So the belief that the Holy Spirit is a person, thus making a group of three divine persons, is not trinitarianism. This needs to be made very clear. Anyone who reads the Bible would confess there is a Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but not everyone believes the trinity doctrine.

There are also those who say that if a person confesses to believe in 'a trinity', this too is a confession of trinitarianism. This though, once again, is incorrect. As has been said, if a person making such a profession only believes in a group of three divine persons (a trinity or a trio), this does not constitute trinitarianism. So professing a belief in 'a trinity', or 'a trio', of divine persons, is definitely not trinitarianism.

Within the SDA Church today there exists a great deal of confusion over the use of the word 'trinity'. This is why, if an explanation of its intended meaning is not given when it is used, it is not only very confusing but also completely meaningless. Allow me to explain.

If person A, without giving any explanation of what is meant by 'the trinity', asks person B if he or she believes in 'the trinity', then whatever answer person B gives (either yes or no), person A will not know what person B is either believing or rejecting. In fact, because the questioner offered no explanation of what was meant by 'the trinity', person B will not even know what is being asked - so there is no point in even answering the question. This is just as there is no point in person A asking person B the question in the first place – at least not without explaining what was meant by 'the trinity'.

What I am trying to say is that professing a belief in 'the trinity', or 'a trinity', is of no value whatsoever - unless it is accompanied by an explanation of what is meant by the usage of these terminologies. It is this lack of explanation that is greatly contributing to the confusion that exists today within the SDA Church.

A Catholic perspective

In the Catholic Herald of January 9th 2020, an article was published that had the title of *Heretic of the Week: Ellen G. White* – which in itself explains what the article is all about. In this article, its author, with respect to Ellen White, informs his readers

> "Her ongoing revelations formed the basis of the doctrine upon which she and her husband, James, founded the Seventh-day Adventist Church (so-called because White claimed that Christ wanted to be worshipped on the Jewish Sabbath). These doctrines included the revival of Jewish dietary customs (although most Adventists are vegetarian today); identification of the pope as Antichrist; three separate Divine Persons rather than the orthodox doctrine of Trinity; and several other unique teachings." *(Charles Coulombe, Catholic Herald, January 9th 2020, 'Heretic of the Week: Ellen G. White')*

Here the author is describing the beliefs of early SDAs, particular those of Ellen White. He is not though, in my opinion, expressing these beliefs correctly. The way that they are expressed here, could be very misleading. It could be interpreted as tritheism.

Even though early SDAs were led through the spirit of prophecy to believe that the Holy Spirit is a person, it was not generally reasoned that this is a divine being like the Father and Son who was separable from them. Instead, it was generally believed that this is the power and omnipresence of both the Father and the Son, while they, meaning the Father and the Son, were physically and bodily in Heaven. In other words, the Holy Spirit was believed to be a spiritual manifestation of the presence, power, and personality of God – not a separable individual divine being as are the Father and the Son.

Concerning the Holy Spirit, the following sums up the growing understanding of early SDAs. In the *Question Corner* of the *Signs of the Times* in 1914, this question was sent in by a reader

> "Some say the Holy Spirit is a person; others say He is a personality; and others, a power only. Till how long should this be a matter of discussion? *(T. A. Z, Signs of the Times, 24th November 1914, 'Question Corner')*

M. C. Wilcox, who was then one of the paper's editorial contributors, replied

> "The reason why the Scriptures speak of the Holy Spirit as a person, it seems to us, is that it brings to us, and to every soul that believes, the personal presence of our Lord Jesus Christ…. Wherever God's children are, there is the Spirit — not an individual person, as we look upon persons, but having the power to make present the Father and the Son." *(ibid)*

At that time (1914), this did very briefly sum up the SDA understanding of the Holy Spirit. This is why I said that the Catholic article that said that early SDAs believed that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were "*three* separate Divine Persons" (see above) is not quite correct, also very misleading. What early SDAs did believe, as we shall see later, was that God and His Son are two separable, even eternally separable, divine beings, which, as we have seen above, is something not in keeping with trinitarian (orthodox) theology. On the other hand, the Holy Spirit was regarded as a person, but not a person separable from them. Instead it was regarded as a spiritual manifestation of the presence of both God the Father and His Son, while they, Father and Son, were physically absent.

It should be noted here that in mainstream orthodox trinity theology, because the three persons of the Godhead are of the one essence (one substance), also because never, under any circumstances, can they be separated from each other, the view is held that even in the incarnation, the Son always has His existence in the one indivisible substance (essence) of God. This means that the Son is never exiled from the Father, therefore never actually vacates Heaven. As one Eastern Orthodox priest explained to me (this was when I asked him what orthodoxy believed regarding trinity theology)

> "We [orthodox trinitarians] maintain rather the invariability of the Godhead (its simplicity and unity) in the sense that no action can lead to ontological change; namely in this case that the Word, one ousia with the Father and the Spirit, never leaves the Father's side even when He joins with our human nature in the Incarnation." *(Email, Father Gregory Hallam, Orthodox Priest, to Terry Hill, 16th May 2007)*

This same theology is found in a hymn (sung as a Christmas carol) written by a 7th century monk named St. Germanus of Auxerre (635-735). This hymn is called *A Great and Mighty Wonder*. The first two verses are as follows (note the first line in the second verse)

"A great and mighty wonder, a full and holy cure:
The Virgin bears the Infant with virgin honour pure!
Repeat the hymn again: "To God on high be glory
And peace on earth to men!"

The Word becomes incarnate and yet remains on high,
And cherubim sing anthems to shepherds from the sky.
Repeat the hymn again: "To God on high be glory
And peace on earth to men!"
(St. Germanus of Auxerre, 'A Great and Mighty Wonder')

I am pointing this out because although this may be believed amongst Christian orthodoxy, I do not want the readers of this document to believe that this is necessarily standard SDA trinity theology. Some may believe it; some may not. I do know of one prominent SDA minister and theologian (now retired) who held this view (and still does as far as know), and I know of another very senior SDA theologian who wished me to know that although he supports SDA trinitarianism, he does not hold this view. So in this area of belief there is division. What the percentage is either way I have no idea.

A changing view of the Holy Spirit

In 1935, which was 20 years after the death of Ellen White, a SDA minister by the name of H. W. Carr of the New York Conference, wrote to W. C. White, Ellen White's third son, asking him what his mother's understanding was of the Holy Spirit.

After making reference to where Ellen White had said that Christ was (note the italicised words) "The *only being* that could enter into all the counsels and purposes of God", also where she says that "Sin originated with him who, *next to Christ*, had been most honored of God and was highest in power and glory among the inhabitants of heaven", also where she says that the mind of Satan "which, ***next to Christ's***, was first among the hosts of God" (*Patriarchs and Prophets* pages 34-36), Carr wrote

"It is urged by some of our leaders now that The Holy Spirit is a third person of the same nature of the Father and son, a member of the heavenly trio, cooperative in creation and personally active with the Father and son." (*W. H. Carr, letter to W. C. White, January 24th 1935)*

He then said, referring to the above quotes from Ellen White

"For many years I have used these statements of Sr. White in combating false teachings relative to defining the Holy Spirit." *(ibid)*

Missing each time from the above quotes of Ellen White is the Holy Spirit, thus giving the distinct impression that this is not an individual person such as are God and Christ. If the Holy Spirit is the same as they are, then why was He not allowed into the counsels and purposes of God, and why say it was Satan who was next to Christ etc.? In other words, if the Holy Spirit is an individual person such as are God and Christ, why not say that He, the Holy Spirit, was next to Christ - not that it was Satan who was next to Christ?

From this we can see that by then (1935), according to Carr, some of our leaders were teaching that the Holy Spirit is an individual person as are the Father and the Son. W. C. White, in his reply to Carr, and after explaining that he could not fully understand his mother's teachings on this matter, wrote the following

> "The statements and the arguments of some of our ministers in their effort to prove that the Holy Spirit was an individual as are God, the father and Christ, the eternal Son, have perplexed me and sometimes they have made me sad. One popular teacher said "we may regard Him, (the Holy Spirit) as the fellow who is down here running things." *(W. C. White, letter to W. H. Carr, April 30th 1935)*

This tends to confirm that by 1935, there were those who were presenting the Holy Spirit as an individual person as are the Father and the Son, but as we can see, this was not the general view of SDAs. It also strongly implies that the trinity doctrine, as held by SDAs today, was far from being prevalent amongst us. W. C. White continued:

> "My perplexities were lessened a little when I learned from the dictionary that one of the meanings of personality, was characteristics. It is stated in such a way that I concluded that there might be personality without bodily form which is possessed by the Father and the Son." *(ibid)*

Regarding the Holy Spirit, this was then the general view of SDAs. It was regarded as "possessed" by, belonging to, both the Father and the Son, not an individual separable person as they are separable persons. Ellen White's son concluded

> "There are many Scriptures which speak of the Father and the Son and the absence of Scripture making similar reference to the united work of the Father and the Holy Spirit or of Christ and the Holy Spirit, has led me to believe that the spirit without individuality was the representative of the Father and the Son throughout the universe, and it was through the Holy Spirit that they dwell in our hearts and make us one with the Father and with the Son." *(ibid)*

This was the view generally expressed by SDAs. This was that through the Holy Spirit, both the Father and the Son dwell within every believer. So it was that the nature of the Holy Spirit was deemed to be a divine mystery - something not revealed by God.

It is true though that Ellen White, as did SDAs in general during the time of her ministry, also for decades afterwards, did believe that God and Christ, the Father and the Son, were separable. It was believed, as I do, that if Christ had sinned, which was possible, He would have been eternally separated from God. In trinity theology, as we have already noted, this is anathema (abhorrent). It is something that trinitarians say is impossible to happen.

Ellen White and the risk factor – a determining doctrine

A confession of belief that allows for the eternal separation of the Father and the Son is certainly not compatible with trinity theology, thus it can be readily seen that anyone professing such a belief could not be a trinitarian. This is regardless of what else is believed by a person making such a profession. This is whether it concerns the Holy Spirit or anything else. This is how we know that Ellen White was not a trinitarian. As we shall now see, she, along with other early SDAs, did believe that the incarnate divine person of the Son of God could have sinned, and thus, if He had sinned, would have lost His eternal existence.

Here are some of her 'risk' statements. The first was in a letter to her son Edson and his wife Emma. I will not be making any comments because these statements speak for themselves.

“Christ has found his pearl of great price in lost, perishing souls. He sold all that he had to come into possession, even engaged to do the work, and run the risk of losing his own life in the conflict." *(Ellen G. White, Letter 119, 1895, to Edson and Emma White, February 18th 1895)*

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“Remember that Christ risked all; "tempted like as we are" he staked even his own eternal existence upon the issue of the conflict.” *(Ellen G. White, General Conference Bulletin 1st December 1895 ‘Seeking the Lost’)*

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“Yet into the world where Satan claimed dominion God permitted His Son to come, a helpless babe, subject to the weakness of humanity. He permitted Him to meet life's peril in common with every human soul, to fight the battle as every child of humanity must fight it, at the risk of failure and eternal loss.” *(Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages. page 49 ‘Unto you a Saviour’, 1898)*

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“Never can the cost of our redemption be realized until the redeemed shall stand with the Redeemer before the throne of God. Then as the glories of the eternal home burst upon our enraptured senses we shall remember that Jesus left all this for us, that He not only became an exile from the heavenly courts, but for us took the risk of failure and eternal loss.” *(Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages page 131, ’The victory’, 1898)*

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“Had there been the least taint of sin in Christ, Satan would have bruised His head. As it was, he could only touch His heel. Had the head of Christ been touched, the hope of the human race would have perished. Divine wrath would have come upon Christ as it came upon Adam. Christ and the church would have been without hope.” *(Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, June 9th 1898, see also Selected Messages Book 1, page 256)*

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“Though Christ humbled Himself to become man, the Godhead was still His own. His Deity could not be lost while He stood faithful and true to His loyalty.” *(Ellen G. White, The Signs of the Times, 10th May 1899, ‘Christ glorified’)*

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“He became subject to temptation, endangering as it were, His divine attributes. Satan sought, by the constant and curious devices of his cunning, to make Christ yield to temptation.” *(Ellen G. White, Letter 5 1900, to W. A Colcord, January 4th 1900)*

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“To the honor and glory of God, His beloved Son -- the Surety, the Substitute -- was delivered up and descended into the prisonhouse of the grave. The new tomb

enclosed Him in its rocky chambers. If one single sin had tainted His character the stone would never have been rolled away from the door of His rocky chamber, and the world with its burden of guilt would have perished." *(Ellen G. White, Ms 81 1893, Diary entry for Sunday, July 2nd, 1893, Wellington, New Zealand)*

Simply from these statements alone, it is evident that Ellen White did not espouse or teach trinity theology. No trinitarian would believe such things as she wrote here.

Very interesting is a remark made by Ella Robinson. She was the eldest granddaughter of Ellen White. In an interview with James R. Nix, who from 2000-2020 was Director of the White Estate, she spoke of a sermon she had heard her grandmother (Ellen White) preach. She recalled:

"I see grandma standing in the pulpit, dressed in her loose fitting, black sack suit, narrow cuffs of white, narrow white collar secure at the throat by a small broach. She's been telling of the matchless love of Christ in suffering ignominy and death and even running the risk of eternal separation from His Father in heaven by taking upon Himself the sins of the world. She pauses, look up, and with one hand resting on the desk and the other lifted heavenward she exclaims in a ringing voice, 'Oh, Jesus, how I love you, how I love you, how I love you.' There is a deep hush. Heaven is very near." *(Ella Robinson, Interview with James R Nix, October 12th 1969)*

It is evident that those close to Ellen White - those who had heard her preach and those who knew of her beliefs - knew she firmly believed that in the plan of redemption for the human race, there was a risk taken concerning Christ's eternal existence. As Ella Robinson recalled, Ellen White spoke of Jesus "running the risk of eternal separation from His Father in heaven". This is in keeping with the statements of Ellen White that we have read above.

Early SDAs and the 'risk factor'

As we shall now see, the beliefs of early SDAs regarding the possibility of the divine Son of God losing His eternal existence were in keeping those of Ellen White. This shows that they too, in their theology, were not trinitarian.

At the 1893 General Conference session, R. A. Underwood (1850-1932), delivered a series of presentations called *Christ's Ownership*. In No. 2 of this series, he asked

"We now enquire, What was the price paid for man's redemption? Was it gold or silver, or the most costly sparkling diamonds of earth? - Oh no, it was the life of the only begotten Son of God. And this not only embraced the death of Christ, but he must live for man, and conquer for man with all the disabilities of the fallen race upon him. In doing this he runs the risk of losing his own existence as well as the existence of all he had created and upheld." *(R. A. Underwood, General Conference Bulletin, February 5th 1893, 'Christ's Ownership – No. 2')*

Underwood clearly believed there was a risk to Christ's existence – thus he could not have been a trinitarian. This is no matter what he believed about the Holy Spirit or anything else. Notice too he believe that the divine Son of God died at Calvary. After quoting various Scriptures showing that Christ could have sinned, also showing the same from the writings of Ellen White, he concludes

> "It is clear from these statements that Christ, in order to purchase man, must take man's nature, capable of yielding to temptation, and that he must be "tempted in all points like as we are." In this he takes upon himself the risk of a possible failure, for man had failed. You see at once that this involves the possibility of losing his own existence and all that he upheld." *(ibid)*

No trinitarian would draw such conclusions. This again shows that Underwood was not a trinitarian.

In the Australian Bible Echo (now Australian Signs), there was a series of editorials called *Questioning God's Ways*. In No. 3 of this series, it said

> "It is not possible to fully express in words all that the fall of man involved. It may be pondered, but it cannot be comprehended. It may be talked of, but it cannot be fully stated." *(Australian Bible Echo, November 22nd 1893, Editorial, Questioning God's ways - No. 3)*

Then, after saying that sin led to man losing his innocence, and all that God had given to him, also that this involved the life of Christ, the following was made clear

> "The fall of man led the Son of God to imperil his eternal interests. It led Him to take the fearful risk of losing his own existence forever." *(ibid)*

Again this is not trinitarianism. After quoting various Bible texts, the author continued (paragraphs not contiguous)

> "The entrance of sin had jeopardised the well being of every creature. In order to secure every one, in order to make it possible that not one need perish, the Son of God imperilled his own existence. He could have yielded to temptation; but had He done so, all would have been lost. How far-reaching and how terrible are the results of sin!" *(ibid)*
>
> "Had He made one mistake, his mission would have been a failure, man would have perished for ever, and the Son of God could never have returned to his Father." *(ibid)*

No trinitarian would make such a confession of belief.

In the next edition of the same paper, No. 4 of the series, the same thought was conveyed. After explaining that Christ, by His death and resurrection, had purchased back the dominion that sin had lost to Satan, it was said (paragraphs not contiguous)

> "Thus the earth, which God gave to Adam at creation (Ps. 115:16), and which Adam bartered away to Satan, was recovered by the Son of God. He purchased it with his own blood, and at the risk of losing his existence. It is therefore called the "purchased possession." Eph. 1:14." *(Australian Bible Echo, December 1st 1893, Editorial, Questioning God's ways - No. 4)*
>
> "When we were held by Satan in a cruel bondage, from which we never could have freed ourselves; when we were lost, irretrievably lost, the Son of God, at the risk of losing his own existence, came to this earth, and suffered and died to set us free, and to save us." *(ibid)*

Once again, this is not trinitarianism.

In the Australian Union Gleaner of December 1896, A. G. Daniells (1858-1935), then the President of the Central Australian Conference (later to become our longest serving General Conference President of 21 years) made these observations (paragraphs not contiguous)

> "At an infinite cost the Son of God redeemed man and his lost possession, from the hand of the enemy. This not only took the life of Christ, but it imperilled His eternal interests. Had He failed, as it -was possible for Him to do, He would have perished, At this cost He rescued what was lost. It is now all His. Says Paul, -" Ye are not, your own, for ye are bought with a price.""

> "When we were held by Satan in a cruel bondage from which we never could have freed ourselves; when we were lost, irretrievably lost, the Son of God, at the risk of losing His own existence, came to this earth, suffered, and died to set us free and to save us. He wrenched all things from the grasp of the prince of darkness, and now claims them as His own." *(A. G. Daniells, The Australian Union Gleaner, page 34, December 1896, 'Our Sacred Stewardship')*

Daniells was not speaking here as a trinitarian.

It can be seen from the following statements that even for many years after Ellen White died, this risk factor was believed by SDAs – and for the whole world to see it was published in our denominational publications. Thus it must be concluded that whatever else these SDAs believed about the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, they certainly were not trinitarian.

During his tenure of General Conference President (1901-1922), A. G. Daniells did not change his views about the risk taken by Christ (see above). We know this because in 1917, which was 16 years after he became president, also 2 years after the death of Ellen White, he wrote in the Church Officer's Gazette (paragraphs not contiguous)

> "In undertaking to redeem what was lost at the fall, the Son of God took the fearful risk of losing his own existence forever. Inspiration plainly declares that when Christ came to this world, he took upon himself man's fallen nature, with all its liabilities. Rom. 8 : 3 ; Heb. 2 :16-18 ; 4 :15. In this he accepted the fearful risk of possible failure. Had he failed, he, with man, would have been lost forever. This thought is almost overwhelming. It seems incredible that Heaven would condescend to purchase sinful, ungrateful man at such an infinite price."

> "At an infinite cost the Son of God redeemed man and his lost possession from the hand of the enemy. This not only took the life of Christ, but it imperiled his eternal interests. Had he failed, as was possible, he would have perished. At this cost he rescued what was lost, and it is now all his." *(A. G. Daniells, The Church Officers' Gazette, October 1917)*

There can be no mistaking what the President is saying. He certainly did not believe trinity theology – meaning he did not reason as do our current theologians. This was now 19 years after the publication of the *Desire of Ages*. This book had not changed his views about the risk that had been taken. This shows that he did not regard this book as Ellen White teaching trinity theology. He believed, as did other early SDAs, that God and Christ were two distinct separable beings – even eternally separable.

Lionel H. Turner (1907-1993) was a well-known, also very well respected, long-serving SDA educationalist. In his early days, in 1931, he wrote the following about God:

> "Somehow out of the wreckage He would save man. So He devised a plan for his salvation; a plan that involved such a magnificent sacrifice that the whole universe wondered when they saw it in operation. It meant that this sin-cursed earth must lie accused beneath the spectacle of the universe every night for thousands of years, the one blot on the peerless beauty of His dominions; for its destruction must be deferred. It meant, too, that the Son of God must divest Himself of His mantle of power, and become a man, with a man's power to fight the battle with sin and keep Himself uncontaminated, come down to this rebel world where His name was hated, and risk His own eternal existence, in order that He might save some ere the hour of destruction came." *(Lionel H. Turner, Australian Signs of the Times March 30th 1931, 'The Most Wonderful Story')*

Later that same year, Turner again spoke of the risk taken in the plan of redemption

> "Thus our Redeemer, at the risk of His own eternal existence, put a new and wondrous meaning into His memorial of the Sabbath. All through the long, long night of sin it was to be man's assurance and hope." *(Lionel H. Turner, Australian Signs of the Times, November 16th 1931, 'God's Code Requires a Rest Day: Has He defined it?')*

Note this was now 1931, 16 years after the death of Ellen White, and 33 years after the publication of *Desire of Ages*.

As the years progressed, even though trinitarian theology was being introduced amongst SDAs, Turner had not changed his views. We know this because 45 years later in 1976, with reference to Christ, he made this comment (Dr Turner was now in his 70's)

> "At His baptism, He had challenged the powers of evil and the spectre of death. And now, less than four years later, in a gesture whose heroism no earthly courage had matched, He wagered His eternal existence against the possibility of restoring to man the primeval character of life with day succeeding day for ever." *(Dr L. Turner, Australian Signs of the Times. August, 1976, 'A Time to Remember')*

It is quite apparent that Dr Turner, in 1976, was not a trinitarian.

In 1949, E. F. Hackman (1898-1951), who from 1947 until the year of his death had been the President of the Inter-American Division (he had also been President of the South-East Californian Conference 1934-1940, also Northern Californian Conference President 1940-1943, also Southern Union President 1943-47), wrote the following:

> "We badly need additional funds with which to make new advances into the kingdom of darkness; but our most outstanding need is to have that spirit of sacrifice in our hearts which led our blessed Lord to risk His eternal existence and finally yield up His life for our salvation. If we were all possessed of this one essential thing, it would answer all our problems over night." *(E. F. Hackman, Inter-American Messenger, November 1949, 'Love Gives All')*

In 1949, Hackman was a high-profile minister. He was not though, speaking as a trinitarian. That much can easily be seen.

Another person who stood firm on the belief that the divine Son of God could have lost His eternal existence was Charles Smull Longacre (1871-1958). He was a stalwart figure in the SDA Church. He is especially remembered for the work he did regarding religious liberty. He was also very strong in his belief that in eternity, Christ was begotten of God, therefore He is truly the Son of God. Longacre first came into contact with SDAs in 1895. Three years later in 1898, he completed his ministerial course. This was the year the *Desire of Ages* was published. Longacre was taught, also continued to teach throughout his ministry, what was then our denominational beliefs concerning the Godhead. He was one the ministers who acted as guard of honour over the casket at Ellen White's funeral.

Longacre well knew of the theology of the trinity doctrine, particularly its concept of the indivisibility of the three personalities. In 1947, in a paper called *The Deity of Christ* that he wrote for the Bible Research Fellowship, he repeatedly emphasised that trinity theology denied that Christ could have lost His eternal existence. In summary of his reasoning he explained

> "If it were impossible for the Son of God to make a mistake or commit a sin, then His coming into this world and subjecting Himself to temptations were all a farce and mere mockery. If it were possible for Him to yield to temptation and fall into sin, then He must have risked heaven and His very existence, and even all eternity. That is exactly what the Scriptures and the Spirit of Prophecy say Christ, the Son of God did do when He came to work out for us a plan of salvation from the curse of sin." *(Charles S. Longacre, 'The Deity of Christ', paper presented to the Bible Research Fellowship Angwin, California January 1947, page 13)*

After quoting a number of Ellen White quotations showing that Christ could have lost His eternal existence (as we have done above) he said (paragraphs not contiguous)

> "If Christ "risked all," even His eternal existence in heaven, then there was a possibility of His being overcome by sin, and if overcome by sin, He would have gone into Joseph's tomb and neither that tomb nor any other tomb would ever have been opened. All would have been lost and He would have suffered "eternal loss," the loss of all He ever possessed - His divinity and His humanity and heaven itself would have been "lost - eternally lost." *(ibid page 14)*

> "If He had failed, His immutability as well as His eternity would have been forfeited and eternally lost." *(ibid)*

He concluded

> "It was possible for one of the God-head to be lost, and eternally lost - and if that had happened, and it was possible to happen, God, the Father, would still have remained as the One and only absolute and living God, reigning supreme over all the unfallen worlds, but with all the human race blotted out of existence on this earth." *(ibid)*

There was no doubt in Longacre's mind that the trinity doctrine obscured from people's minds the love that God has for humanity by putting at risk the eternal life of His own Son. It is unfortunate that not many SDA's today see it that way – especially the trinitarians.

In my research, I did come across a number of other statements from those who expressed the belief that in becoming incarnate, a risk was taken concerning the eternal existence of divine Son of God. Here, without comment, I will share some of them with you. All these statements, like some already quoted above, were made after the death of Ellen White, which of course was after the publication *Desire of Ages (1898)*.

The first is from W. H. Branson who was then, in 1943 when he made this statement, the GC vice-president. Seven years later in 1950 he became President

> "It is a most wonderful thought to me, that the Creator of this world so loved man that He risked all heaven to save him; …" *(W. H. Branson, Inter-American Division Messenger, June 1943, 'The New Covenant Part one)*

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> "See Him, weak and trembling, bearing His cross on Calvary's hill, cruel nails are driven through His hands and His feet. He hangs on the cross, the suffering Prince of heaven amidst the railing priests and the jeering rabble, alone, forsaken by man and left alone by God, to die, to tread the bitter wine-press alone. And in the endeavor He risked all, He might have failed and "suffered eternal loss." *(P. E. Brodersen, Assistant editor, South American Bulletin, November 1925, 'The value of a soul')*

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> "No earthly friendship can begin to compare with that which exists between our Elder Brother and those for whom He risked heaven and eternal life." *(M. S. King, The Lifeboat Magazine, December 1928, I Have Found a Friend')*

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> "Is there in your heart a taint of selfishness or a desire to sacrifice less for the Master? Consider Christ's sacrifice through those hours of suffering. Look upon the cross, and hear that cry of anguish, " My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? " Look upon the crown of thorns, the riven side, the marred feet, and remember in this Christ risked all for us." *(J. L. Shaw, Review and Herald, November 21st 1929, 'Awake to the needs of the hour')*

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> "I was a lost sheep, having strayed far away from the fold of the Good Shepherd. Out into the blackness and tempest of the stormy night the Saviour came to seek me. Into the abysmal depths of the yawning chasm He descended, not stopping to consider the return. He risked His life to save me, and that is how I know He loves me." *(Elva Zachrison, Signs of the Times, June 7th 1932, 'The Incarnate God')*

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> "In order to make this righteousness available to us, Jesus risked His own existence. Faced with the possibility of failure and eternal loss to Himself, He undertook to live a sinless life in human flesh." *(S. A. Kaplan, The Ministry, September 1955, 'Christ's Righteousness in a Jewish Tradition')*

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> "It was not crucifixion that took the life of the Son of God. Death from crucifixion was a long, slow process, often taking several days. Jesus died from the weight of your sins and mine, from the tearing anguish of making the decision He did. Never forget that that decision must be measured by the value of the life He risked." *(Our Times, VOP Broadcast, April 1965, 'Why did Jesus die?')*

We can see from the above that these earlier SDAs were not trinitarian. As Richard Rice pointed out (after showing that certain important SDAs were antagonistic towards the trinity doctrine)

> "In fact, C. Mervyn Maxwell concludes that early Adventists were "about as uniform in opposing Trinitarianism as they were in advocating belief in the Second Coming." *(Richard Rice, Spectrum, Fall 2013, 'Adventists Finding Identity in God')*

it should be quite apparent by now, at least to everyone who has read this article this far, that very early SDAs, as well as later ones, were not trinitarian. This no matter what they believed or didn't believe about the Holy Spirit. The fact that they believed that the divine Son of God died at Calvary, also that He could have lost his eternal existence, firmly refutes any idea that they were trinitarian. Ellen White though never rebuked these early SDAs because of their beliefs concerning Christ. As we have seen, she believed the same.

Unfortunately, as I said at the beginning of this article, there are those today who are presenting the idea that just because some early SDAs described the Holy Spirit as a person (or a being) they must have been trinitarian. The same is said about those who used the phrase 'the trinity' or 'a trinity'. It is said that they too can be termed trinitarian. Three early SDAs I have heard cited are, S. N. Haskell, Uriah Smith and Judson Washburn, so we will be looking at what they believed. This will be a 'long haul', but the point will be proven. Just because a person refers to the Holy Spirit as a person (or a being), and just because a person uses the word 'trinity', this does not mean that this person accepts trinity doctrine theology.

The case of S. N. Haskell

Stephen N. Haskell (1834-1922) was a very well known, self-educated, sometimes controversial, SDA minister. He had united with God's remnant Sabbath-keeping people as early as 1853. This was 9 years after the great disappointment of October 22nd 1844. There was not very much that Haskell did not know regarding the SDA Church. He probably did more to reaching out to the public with literature than anyone else. He even had his own small publishing house – which apparently, at times, did not sit well with our own publishing houses. He was the originator of the privately sponsored self-supporting publication *Bible Training School*. It began its life in 1902 when Haskell was around 70 years of age and came to an end in 1919 when his second wife Hetty died. Three years later in 1922, Haskell died.

Ellen White had a great deal of respect for Haskell. They had a very close working relationship together, although she did turn down his proposal of marriage. It is said that she wrote more letters to Haskell that anyone else outside of her family. It would be too much to quote here all of what Ellen White said about Haskel, but what she said to her son William is a typical example

> "Brother Haskell is the Lord's servant, a man of opportunity. We appreciate his experience, his judgment, his thoughtful care and caution. He is indeed a mighty man in the Scriptures. He opens the Word of God in such a simple manner, making every subject reveal its true importance. He urges home practical godliness." *(Ellen G. White, Letter 140 1897, to W. C. White, June 6th 1897)*

Haskell could well be described as a devotee of Ellen White – which did cause problems. He had such a high regard for her prophetic calling, also for what she wrote, he is said to have believed her as being verbally inspired. In fact his views regarding her were so extreme that W. C. White had to counsel him about it. In a letter, and after saying to him that neither his mother (Ellen White), nor his father (James White), nor the General Conference, regarded Ellen White's writings as verbally inspired, also saying that teaching such a thing was making it very difficult for the denominational leaders to hold the brethren faithful to the testimonies, W. C. White wrote

> "Some have expressed the opinion to me that the extreme and extravagant positions taken by a few men, including yourself, are doing more to bring the shaking over the Testimonies than any other element in the work." *(W. C. White to S. N. Haskell, January 15th 1913)*

Haskell, with his attitude towards Ellen White, would have agreed with everything she said and wrote. There can be no doubt that everything she had written about the possibility of the Son of God losing His eternal existence, also about Him dying at Calvary, which is totally opposed in trinitarian theology, he would have regarded as pure divine truth. Haskell therefore, like Ellen White, could not have been a trinitarian.

In 1905, Haskell had a book published called *The Seer of Patmos*. In this book he wrote

> "Back in the ages, which finite mind cannot fathom, the Father and Son were alone in the universe." *(S. N. Haskell, The Story of the Seer of Patmos, pages 93-94, chapter V, 'A Glimpse of Heaven' 1905)*

There is no mention here of the Holy Spirit. Haskell simply says that before anything was created, no one existed except for the Father and the Son. He also says of Christ

> "Christ was the first begotten of the Father, and to Him Jehovah made known the divine plan of Creation. The plan of the creation of worlds was unfolded, together with the order of beings which should people them." *(ibid)*

In 1905, this was typical SDA theology. It was believed that before anything was created, Christ was begotten (brought forth) of God. Note it says that Father "made known" to Christ the "divine plan of creation". This is not trinity theology. Haskell continued

> "The fall of Lucifer was foreseen; likewise the possibility of the introduction of sin, which would mar the perfection of the divine handiwork. It was then, in those early councils, that Christ's heart of love was touched; and the only begotten Son pledged His life to redeem man, should he yield and fall. Father and Son, surrounded by impenetrable glory, clasped hands. It was in appreciation of this offer, that upon Christ was bestowed creative power, and the everlasting covenant was made; and henceforth Father and Son, with one mind, worked together to complete the work of creation. Sacrifice of self for the good of others was the foundation of it all." *(ibid)*

Again nothing is said here about the Holy Spirit. Notice that Haskell said that the Son had creative power "bestowed" upon Him. No trinitarian would make such a remark. On page 95 we find these words

> "As a token of the covenant between Father and Son, the bow was placed about the throne" *(ibid page 95)*

Again the Holy Spirit is 'missing'. A few pages later, Haskell penned these words

> "Christ was the firstborn in heaven; He was likewise the firstborn of God upon earth, and heir to the Father's throne. Christ, the firstborn, though the Son of God, was clothed in humanity, and was made perfect through suffering. He took the form of man, and through eternity, He will remain a man." *(ibid, pages 98-99)*

This is certainly not trinitarian theology. Later on page 217 Haskell explained

> "Before the creation of our world, "there was war in heaven." Christ and the Father covenanted together; and Lucifer, the covering cherub, grew jealous because he was not admitted into the eternal councils of the Two who sat upon the throne." *(ibid, page 217)*

There is no mention here of the Holy Spirit being on the throne with the Father and the Son. No trinitarian would write such things as Haskell did here. At the end of the book, questions are asked concerning what is written in the various chapters. This question was asked about chapter two

> "Name the three Beings that unite in sending a blessing to the church." *(S. N. Haskell, The Seer of Patmos, page 374, 'Questions to study')*

Interesting is that in chapter two, it is Gabriel who is referred to as "Christ's attendant" who makes known to us the mystery of God, and who opened the Revelation to John on Patmos (pages 29-30). The answer though to Haskell's question, at least the one that immediately springs to mind, is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but whatever he meant by "Beings" is not explained. Haskell could not have meant that the Holy Spirit was a divine being in the same sense as are the Father and the Son. We have seen this from what he wrote above, which, when all is said and done, is only the same as where he had written on page 325

> "In wisdom, the arch enemy [Satan] excelled all in the universe, except the Father and the Son; in beauty, he outshone the angelic hosts; in power, he stood next to Christ." *(page 325)*

Nothing is said about Satan's wisdom and power being less than that of the Holy Spirit's wisdom and power – only less than that of the Father and the Son. So if Haskell regarded the Holy Spirit as a divine being, what sort of being is it? Certainly it is not like the Father and the Son. Haskell's comments remind us of where Ellen White wrote in *Patriarchs and Prophets*

> "To dispute the supremacy of the Son of God, thus impeaching the wisdom and love of the Creator, had become the purpose of this prince of angels. To this object he was about to bend the energies of that master mind, which, next to Christ's, was first among the hosts of God … Before the assembled inhabitants of heaven the King declared that none but Christ, the Only Begotten of God, could fully enter into His purposes…" *(Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, page 36)*

If the Holy Spirit is an individual being such as God and Christ are individual beings, then why would He not be allowed to enter into God's purposes – and why say that Satan's "master mind" was next to Christ's mind? Why not say it was next to the Holy Spirit's mind? In keeping with Ellen White's words, Haskell concluded:

> "Jealous of Christ, the only one united with the Father in the councils of heaven, Satan raised rebellion." *(Seer of Patmos, page 325)*

Again the Holy Spirit is excluded. Earlier on page 133, Haskell had made this comment

> "That which the Father and Son alone can reveal is a knowledge of God, and this knowledge of God, is the seal placed in the foreheads of the chosen generation." *(ibid page 133)*

Again Haskell excludes the Holy Spirit. Thus once more we are left to ponder what he meant by "three Beings" (see above).

Haskell had another book published called *The Story of the Prophet Daniel*. In this book he wrote

> "Gabriel was only an angel, upheld by the same Power that sustained John, and he would not for one moment allow John to be deceived by thinking he was a part of the great Trinity of heaven, and worthy of the worship of mankind." *(S. N. Haskell, The Story of the Prophet Daniel, page 132, Chapter 9, 'The eighth chapter of Daniel")*

Haskell here speaks of "the great Trinity of heaven" so this must include the Holy Spirit, yet later he writes (referring to the closing scenes of this world's history)

> "The number which would have peopled the earth had no sin ever entered, is gathered about the Father and the Son. Christ looks upon them, and in spite of the remembrance of the fall, and the 'pain and sorrow which the plan of salvation cost, when He sees the travail of His soul, He is satisfied." *(S. N. Haskell, The Story of the Prophet Daniel, page 309, Chapter 18, 'The Closing scene' 1908)*

Again no mention is made here of the Holy Spirit. This is even though Haskell had previously spoken of "the great Trinity" (see above). He could write though

> "In the beginning the body of man was created to be a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit; but Satan gained possession, and man partook of an evil nature. Before the body can again become a temple for the Spirit of God, the evil nature must die." *(ibid, page 156)*

Haskell could also speak of Joseph in Egypt as "a temple for the indwelling of the Spirit of God." He could also write that, "Israel had lost the spiritual truth that the body is the dwelling place for the Holy Spirit" (see pages 158 & 159).

In his book *The Seer of Patmos* he wrote

> "When it is fully demonstrated that the Spirit of the Eternal Father can dwell in man, then those who have overcome as Christ overcame, will inherit the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world." *(S. N. Haskell, The Seer of Patmos, page 142, Chapter IX, 'The Trumpets')*

In keeping with Scripture, Haskell speaks of the Holy Spirit as belonging to (being possessed by), God, also as dwelling within those who love and trust God (1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19).

It has been noted that in the *BTS* of February 1906, also in the next month's edition, a one paragraph article can be found in which is said

> "The doctrine of the trinity is true when rightly understood. They are one in nature, one in purpose, and so perfect is that union, that Christ said, "I and My Father are one" *(Bible Training School, February 1906, 'Union', see also March 1906)*

In this issue of the *BTS, as* in most issues, there is found various articles. Some are credited to Haskell, while others bear the names of their respective authors. This included that of Haskell's second wife Hetty. The article mentioned above though (*Union*), as are other articles in this same issue, is uncredited, so we do not know who wrote it. Why though, if Haskell had written these uncredited articles, would they not be credited to him? As far as I can see, there is no reason. This lends itself to believing he did not write them. This same article was published in the *Caribbean Watchman* of February 1907. Again no author is cited. It simply says "Selected" – which again strongly implies that Haskell did not write it.

The focus of attention here is on "The doctrine of the trinity is true when rightly understood".

There is of course, by implication, a right and a wrong way of interpreting the trinity. Nothing is said in the article concerning which is the right way or which is the wrong way. In fact, in the article, the Holy Spirit is not even mentioned. Its entire emphasis is on the oneness between God and Christ. One can only assume that if Haskell wrote it, he could not have meant that a correct understanding of "the trinity" was the orthodox view. Apart from his views of the Holy Spirit, he would have agreed with Ellen White 100% about what she said about the divine Son of God dying at Calvary, also the possibility of Him losing His eternal existence – which is impossible in trinity orthodoxy.

There are some very interesting things written in the *BTS*. I will mention a few. In the 1910 edition, the question is asked, "Is the Holy Spirit a person?" The answer is given

> "The Holy Spirit is represented in the Bible as one of the Trinity. Of the Holy Spirit, Christ said that it "proceedeth from the Father"; and, "He shall testify of Me." John 15:26. In many instances in the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is spoken of by the use of the personal pronoun "He" and " His." From this we would conclude that the Holy Spirit has a personality. While the Holy Spirit has a personality, and is represented as an intelligence, yet it is spoken of in a way that we cannot comprehend its personality. The definite form of its personality is not revealed in the Bible." *(Bible Training School, December 1910, 'Question Box')*

Here the Holy Spirit is spoken of as "one of the Trinity" and an "it". It is also described as possessing a personality, albeit it says that its personality cannot be understood because God has not revealed it. The article also says of the Holy Spirit

> "In Acts 2:3, 4, it is represented as "cloven tongues" ; and in verses 17 and 18, it is represented as an influence. In the Bible it is spoken of as divested of all personality; in other places it is represented as a person; in another place, as "cloven tongues

> of fire"; and still again, it is represented in a "bodily shape like a dove." Luke 3:22. It is not confined to a personality, as a man, as cloven tongues, as a dove, or as being only an influence. It is evident that the Holy Spirit is one of the Trinity, and fully represents God, and Christ, and the Trinity; and appears in 'any form or shape, or without form or shape, as best answers the purpose of God" *(ibid)*

Repeatedly the Holy Spirit is referred to as an "it", and yet is said to be "one of the Trinity". Whoever wrote this reply, whether Haskell or someone else, could never have regarded the Holy Spirit as an individual being as is the Father and the Son.

In the August 1912 edition, under the heading of *Bible Readers* Class', it says

> "THE Spirit of God is the third person in the trinity. It is a divine agency by which everything is said to be accomplished." *(Bible Training School, August 1912, 'Bible Readers' Class)*

Here the Holy Spirit is again called "the third person in the Trinity" – also an "it". The article then says under the heading of *Importance of the Holy Spirit*

> "John 16:13. The Spirit of God never speaks of Himself. Heb. 1:2, 3. It speaks of the Father and of the Son as personal beings, but never speaks of Himself as having a personality, but uses a personal pronoun when speaking of Himself." *(ibid)*

This time, as opposed to what was said in the *Bible Training School* of December 1910 (see above), it says the Holy Spirit does *not have* a personality. Whoever wrote this, whether it was Haskell or someone else, certainly did not regard the Holy Spirit as an individual person such as are God and Christ. Two years later in the *BTS* we find these words

> "The Holy Spirit is the divine agency by which God accomplishes His work. To it is delegated all the power of Christ and in this sense it forms the third person of the Trinity. … God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit form the Trinity" *(Bible Training School, Missionary edition, 'Bible Readers' Class', February 1914)*

The Holy Spirit is spoken of as forming part of "the trinity" yet is referred to as an "it".

Over the years in the *BTS*, the phrase "the trinity" is used a number of times, but never is there given any explanation as to what is meant by this terminology. Needless to say, because of Haskell's views concerning both Christ and the Holy Spirit, he could not have used this terminology in the sense of trinity orthodoxy. As did Ellen White when referring to the Holy Spirit, he very often used the word "it".

In the November edition of the *BTS*, Haskell claimed that Melchisedec was the Holy Spirit. After detailing the attributes of Melchisedec he wrote

> "The Holy Spirit, "the third person of the Godhead" the soul-of Christ's life, and the light and life of the world is the only one to whom all of the above specifications will apply. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Godhead, and therefore is "King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is King of peace." *(S. N. Haskell, Bible Training School. November 1904, 'Who is Melchisedec?)*

The year previous, in an uncredited article in the *BTS*, it said (again after detailing the attributes of Melchisedec)

”There is but one being in the universe that fills all these specifications. That is the Spirit of God. He ever lives to intercede. He has no beginning of days or end of life. He represents the Father and the Son. … This being is equal to the Father and the Son. It is the voice of God in the world. A careful study of the above and a belief of the same will forever settle the question as to who Melchisedec is” *(Bible Training School, November 1903, ‘Melchisedec’)*

Like Haskell, this uncredited article is saying that Melchisedec is the Holy Spirit. This would mean, if it were true, that the Holy Spirit was made flesh and dwelt among us. He is referred to here as a “being”, a “He” and an “it”. The number of times Ellen White refers to the Holy Spirit as an “it” is measured in hundreds, but as far as I know, God never led her to write that “it” is a “being”. This same article was quoted again in *The Welcome Visitor* of January 24th 1906 – now the Visitor. The editor noted at the end of the article

“This article is published by request of Sister Ivy L. Walker, and contains the statement from Sister White, that she quoted at the camp-meeting, which some seemed to think was a mistake. - Editor.” *(Bessie E. Russell, The Welcome Visitor, later The Columbia Union Visitor, and Visitor, January 24th 1906, ‘Melchisedec’)*

There is nothing in the Bible or the writings of Ellen White that says that Melchisedec was the Holy Spirit. It was rumoured, as suggested here, that she had been heard to say this (maybe this is why Haskell believed it), but we have no written documentation of hers to support it. Referring to this in the *Review and Herald* of January 11th 1917 (this was when answering an enquiry from a reader), its editor, F. M. Wilcox, refers to this as “A Garbled Quotation”. He said there is no evidence that Ellen White said that Melchisedec was the Holy Spirit.

In 1907, the *BTS* published what I would say is a correct view regarding Melchisedec. This was in an uncredited article called *Melchisedec again*. It can be found here

https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Periodicals/BTS/BTS19071101-V06-06.pdf

Did Haskell write this uncredited article, or was it someone who wanted to put the ‘record straight’? As far as I know we cannot tell but what we do know is that nothing is said in this article about Melchisedec being the Holy Spirit. What we also know is that in the April 1914 edition of the *BTS*, in the *Question Box*, it was still being said that Melchisedec was the Holy Spirit. Interestingly, three years later in the *Question Box* of the September 1917 edition of the *BTS*, a reader asked:

“Please tell me through the columns of the Bible Training School where in the Spirit of prophecy there is any evidence that Melchisedec is the Holy Spirit? *(Bible Training School, September 1917, ‘Question Box’)*

The answer was returned (after misquoting Ellen White as saying it was not Christ who spoke through Melchisedec)

“At the baptism of Christ the Holy Spirit appeared as a dove; on the day of Pentecost, as cloven tongues of fire. Is it unreasonable to conclude that the same spirit could appear to Abraham in the person of the king of Salem? *(ibid)*

From the above, we can see that more often than not, Haskell regarded the Holy Spirit as an *it*, and while his use of the word *trinity* was never defined in any detail, he certainly did not use it in the sense of trinity orthodoxy.

Taking everything into consideratio, especially his views about Christ that were in keeping with what had been taught within the SDA Church from its beginnings, Haskell certainly cannot be classified as a trinitarian. There is too much evidence to the contrary. Perhaps here it would be well worth contemplating something Alonzo T. Jones wrote in his book *The Two Republics.* This concerned the Council of Nicaea where the basis of what was to become trinity orthodoxy was 'officially' formulated by the church.

> "There was no dispute about the fact of there being a Trinity, it was about the nature of the Trinity. Both parties believed in precisely the same Trinity, but they differed upon the precise relationship which the Son bears to the Father." *(A. T. Jones, The two republics, pages 332 – 333 'Establishment of the Catholic faith')*

From the evidence we have seen above, it seems to me that this is how Haskell, also other SDAs, used the words 'the trinity', or 'a trinity'. It was just a collective expression for the three – the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Certainly it was not as used in trinity orthodoxy.

The case of Uriah Smith

Uriah Smith (1832-1903) was a long-serving member of the SDA Church. He had joined the Sabbath keeping Adventists in 1852, and for almost 50 years was either editor of the *Review and Herald* or one of its editorial staff. He first became editor at the age of 23 in 1855. In 1903, on his way to the office at the age of 70, he died of a stroke.

Smith wrote extensively regarding subjects such as the history of Christianity, Bible prophecy and the gospel. Two books of his that can readily be said to be SDA classics are his *Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation*, also *Looking unto Jesus*, the latter of which was published the same year as Ellen White's *Desire of Ages* (1898).

Uriah Smith's beliefs and teachings concerning God and Christ were the same as those of his fellow SDAs. In the 1903 version of his book *Daniel and the Revelation* he explained of Christ

> "To the Lamb, equally with the Father who sits upon the throne, praise is ascribed in this song of adoration. Commentators, with great unanimity, have seized upon this as proof that Christ must be coeval with the Father; for otherwise, say they, here would be worship paid to the creature which belongs only to the Creator. But this does not seem to be a necessary conclusion. The Scriptures certainly clearly intimate that the existence of Christ had a beginning (John 1:1), which was not so in the case of the Father. (See remarks on Revelation 3:14, where it is shown that Christ is not a created being.) But while he does not possess a co-eternity of past existence with the Father, the beginning of his existence, as the begotten of the Father, antedates the entire work of creation, in relation to which he stands a joint creator with God. John 1:3; Hebrews 1:2." *(Uriah Smith, Daniel and the Revelation, 1903 edition, page 401, 'The Heavenly Sanctuary Continued')*

He then said of John 5:26, Philippians 2:9 and Hebrews 1:8

> "These testimonies show that Christ is now an object of worship equally with the Father; but they do not prove that with him he holds an eternity of past existence.' *(ibid)*

Smith believed that Christ's personality had a beginning. This is definitely not trinitarian theology. The above was the final edition of D&R while Smith was alive. He died the same year (1903).

These same views of Christ were reflected in his book *Looking Unto Jesus* (1898). In the chapter called *Christ as Creator* he wrote

> "God alone is without beginning. At the earliest epoch when a beginning could be, -- a period so remote that to finite minds it is essentially eternity, -- appeared the Word. 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' John 1:1. This uncreated Word was the Being, who, in the fullness of time, was made flesh, and dwelt among us." *(Uriah Smith, 'Looking unto Jesus', 1898, page 10, Christ as Creator)*

Notice here, as did SDA's in general, Smith spoke of God as an individual person in His own right (the Father), also of Christ as an individual person distinct from God. Smith then said of Christ

> "His beginning was not like that of any other being in the universe. It is set forth in the mysterious expressions, 'his [God's] only begotten Son' (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9), 'the only begotten of the Father' (John 1:14), and 'I proceeded forth and came from God.' John 8:42. Thus it appears that by some divine impulse or process, not creation, known only to Omniscience, and possible only to Omnipotence, the Son of God appeared." *(ibid)*

Again this is not trinitarian theology. Immediately following this, Smith said of the Holy Spirit

> "And then the Holy Spirit (by an infirmity of translation called ''the Holy Ghost"), the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, the divine afflatus and medium of their power, representative of them both (Ps. 139:7), was in existence also." *(ibid)*

The records of our denominational history show that Smith's views concerning God and Christ, also that of the Holy Spirit, was the faith of early 1900's SDAs. It was believed that in eternity, before anything was created, Christ was begotten (brought forth) of God therefore He is truly the Son of God. Their belief concerning the Holy Spirit was that it is both the "Spirit of Christ" and the "Spirit of God", also that the Holy Spirit was "representative of them both". The Holy Spirit was not regarded as an individual person as the Father and the Son are individual persons. Shortly afterwards, Smith wrote

> "No work of creation was accomplished till after Christ became an active agent upon the scene; for all this work was wrought through him" *(ibid)*

Smith later explained how he regarded what it meant for Christ to have been begotten of God:

> "With the Son, the evolution of deity, as deity, ceased. All else, of things animate or inanimate, has come in by creation of the Father and the Son — the Father the antecedent cause, the Son the acting agent through whom all has been wrought. No ranks of intelligences, it matters not how high, above or below; no orders of cherubim or seraphim; no radiant thrones or extensive dominions, principalities, or powers, but were created by our Lord Jesus Christ." *(ibid page 13)*

By early SDA's, this is how Christ was regarded. It was believed that because He was begotten of God, He is God.

Very interesting is that in the book called *The Trinity*, which was especially published in 2002 by our church in order to combat the growing support of non-trinitarianism amongst our church membership, Jerry Moon, one of its co-authors, made this comment

> "Uriah Smith's *Looking Unto Jesus* was the most comprehensive and carefully nuanced exposition of the non-trinitarian view among Adventists." *(Jerry Moon, 'The Trinity', chapter 13 'Trinity and anti-trinitarianism in Seventh-day Adventist history' page 196, 2002)*

I would say that this accurately sums up Smith's views – also, during the time of Ellen White's ministry, the views held by the vast majority of SDAs. They were definitely non-trinitarian. What is also very interesting is that never once did Ellen White condemn or criticise these views. We will return to that point later.

Gerhard Pfandl, as Associate Director of our Biblical Research Institute, noted of Smith's views concerning Christ being the Son of God

> "Not only did Uriah Smith, editor of the *Review and Herald*, believe until his death in 1903 that Christ had a beginning, but during the first decades of this century there were many who held on to the view that in some way Christ came forth from the Father, i.e., he had a beginning, and was therefore inferior to Him" *(Gerhard Pfandl, Seventh-day Adventist Biblical Institute, 'The doctrine of the trinity among Adventists' 1999)*

What Pfandl said about Smith believing that Christ's personality having a beginning is correct, but by early SDAs, Christ was not considered to be inferior to the Father. Christ, because it was believed that He was begotten of God, as say the Scriptures (John 1:14, 18, 3:16, 3:18, 1 John 4:9), was said to be God. As Smith explained,

> "With the Son, the evolution of deity, as deity, ceased" (see above).

William Johnsson as editor of the Adventist Review wrote

> "Many of the pioneers, including James White, J. N. Andrews, Uriah Smith and J. H. Waggoner held to an Arian or semi-Arian view - that is, the Son at some point in time, before the creation of our world, was generated by the Father." *(William Johnsson, Adventist Review January 6th 1994 Article 'Present Truth - Walking in God's Light', 1994)*

What we can see from the above is that Uriah Smith was most definitely not a trinitarian. This is regardless of what he believed concerning the Holy Spirit. We will though look at some of the statements he made about this divine person.

Smith, as one of the editors of the *Review and Herald*, would answer questions sent in by readers. One such question was

> "…Are we to understand that the Holy Ghost is a person, the same as the Father and the Son? Some claim that it is, others that it is not." *(Review and Herald, Oct. 28th, 1890, 'The Question Chair)*

Note the questioner was not asking if the Holy Spirit is a person, but a person, "the same as the Father and the Son". Uriah Smith answered

> "The terms 'Holy Ghost,' are a harsh and repulsive translation. It should be 'Holy Spirit' (hagion pneuma) in every instance. This Spirit is the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of Christ; the Spirit being the same whether it is spoken of as pertaining to God or Christ. But respecting this Spirit, the Bible uses expressions which cannot be harmonized with the idea that it is a person like the Father and the Son. Rather it is shown to be a divine influence from them both, the medium which represents their presence and by which they have knowledge and power through all the universe, when not personally present. …In one of Christ's discourses (John, chapters 14,15, and 16) this Spirit is personified as 'the Comforter,' and as such has the personal and relative pronouns, 'he,' 'him,' and 'whom,' applied to it. But usually it is spoken of in a way to show that it cannot be a person, like the Father and the Son. For instance, it is often said to be 'poured out' and 'shed abroad.' But we never read about God or Christ being poured out or shed abroad." *(ibid)*

In a sermon at the next year's (1891) General Conference session, Uriah Smith said

> "The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God; it is also the Spirit of Christ. It is that divine, mysterious emanation through which they carry forward their great and infinite work. It is called the Eternal Spirit; it is a spirit that is omnisicent [sic] and omnipresent; it is the spirit that moved, or brooded, upon the face of the waters in the early days when chaos reigned, and out of chaos was brought the beauty and the glory of this world." *(Uriah Smith, Sermon, March 14th 1891, General Conference Bulletin March 18th 1891, 'The Spirit of Prophecy and our relationship to It')*

Another question asked was "Through what divine agency is the love of God imparted to us?" The answer Smith gave was

> "God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the sinner himself, are all concerned in the work of conversion; and when a person is converted, his heart is filled with love, -- love to God and love to his fellow-men. God is love, and Christ is love, and they have promised to take up their abode with the believer; and when they are dwelling in the heart, they of course bring perfect love with them….. We can hardly separate these agencies in the work. For instance, Christ created the worlds; but God created them through Christ. The Holy Spirit is the representative of God and Christ sent forth into all the earth. Rev. 5:5. The Holy Spirit works; but it is God and Christ working through it. *(Uriah Smith, Review and Herald, November 19th `1895 'In the question chair")*

Notice that Smith, as did the early SDAs, including Ellen White, refers to the Holy Spirit as an "it". Another question sent in by a reader was

> "Do the Scriptures warrant the praise or worship of the Holy Spirit? If not, does not the last line of the doxology contain an unscriptural sentiment?" *(Review and Herald, October 27th 1896, 'The Question Chair')*

The answer was returned:

> "We know of no place in the Bible where we are commanded to worship the Holy Spirit, as was commanded in the case of Christ (Heb. 1:6), or where we find an example of the worship of the Holy Spirit, as in the case of Christ. Luke 21:52. Yet in the formula for baptism, the name "Holy Ghost," or "Holy Spirit," is associated with that of the Father and the Son. And if the name can be thus used, why could it not properly stand as a part of the same trinity in the hymn of praise, " Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost "? *(ibid)*

It should go without saying that Smith, because of what we have seen of his beliefs, particularly concerning Christ, was not using the word "trinity" as in the trinity doctrine. He was definitely not a trinitarian. He appears to have been using the word "trinity" to depict the three collectively. As he said, "We know of no place in the Bible where we are commanded to worship the Holy Spirit, as was commanded in the case of Christ".

Some, in 2023, are still attempting to make the Holy Spirit look like a person the same as God and Christ are individual persons. They even use the writings of Ellen White such as the following to do so. In 1896, in the 'famous' Baker letter, she wrote

> "God help you to daily hang your helpless soul on Jesus Christ. Speak the truth in no hesitating, halting style; but speak it with boldness and assurance, and with the spirit of the Holy Ghost resting upon you." *(Ellen G. White, Letter 8 1895, to W. L. H. Baker, February 9th, 1896)*

Every individual has a spirit of his or her own, so some use this statement to make it look as though Ellen White is saying that the Holy Spirit has a spirit of His own. If this were true, it would mean that the Holy Spirit dwelling within us as Christians would not be the Holy Spirit Himself but the spirit of the Holy Spirit – which is something I would say could not be proven from Scripture.

So what did Ellen White mean when she said, "the spirit of the Holy Ghost"?

This is the only place in her writings where I have found she made such a statement. Could it be that she used this phrase as she did when saying "spirit of humility", or the "spirit of meekness" or the "spirit of kindness", as meaning an attribute? It is more than likely.

Returning our thoughts to Uriah Smith: Taken overall, regardless of what his views were concerning the Holy Spirit, he could never be described as a trinitarian. This is even though he used the word 'trinity' to describe the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For one thing he believed Christ's personality had a beginning, which is something that is totally opposed to trinity theology, and he believed that the Holy Spirit was both the Spirit of Christ and the Spirit of God the Father, A study of his writings would also show that he believed the divine person of the Son of God died at Calvary, which is a view not acceptable in trinitarian theology.

The case of Judson Washburn

I have heard it said that because Washburn had said that the Holy Spirit was a person, that he can be termed a trinitarian, but let's look at the facts. So who was Judson Washburn?

Washburn was of the leading evangelists in the SDA Church. He had been baptised by James White. He was also a close friend of Ellen White. He kept her informed of the progress of the work wherever in the world it took him. He knew and perfectly understood the denominational faith of SDAs. When EGW went to Australia, Washburn came to the UK. In the *Review and Herald* it was reported of his success (paragraphs not contiguous)

> "Unprecedented success attended his crusades in London, Bath, Bristol, Newport, and Cardiff. This growth in membership left other workers amazed. By 1898 it became necessary to convene a meeting of ministers in Bath to discuss the "division of the British field into conferences."…By December 1892, Washburn was preaching to congregations of 500, and never less than 160." *(David Marshall, Adventist Review, January 26th 1989, J. S. Washburn: The Unsung Hero)*

> "Preachers thundered from their pulpits against Washburn and the Sabbath. They printed tracts against the Adventist faith. Nevertheless, Washburn explained to Ellen White, "all who know anything about us know that we believe in the gospel and that our doctrine is not simply a legal theory" *(ibid)*

In 1939, - note the date well – Washburn believed that an attempt was being made to bring trinity theology into the message of the SDA Church. This was after reading the notes of a sermon that his long-time associate W. W. Prescott had preached at Takoma Park on Sabbath October 14th 1939. He believed that Prescott, in his sermon, was teaching trinitarian theology. This is why, in an open letter to the General Conference, he wrote concerning the trinity doctrine

> "This monstrous doctrine transplanted from heathenism into the Roman Papal Church is seeking to intrude its evil presence into the teachings of the Third Angel's Message." *(Judson Washburn, 'The Trinity', Letter to the SDA General Conference, 1939)*

As I said, note the date. It was 1939, and by then, the doctrine of the trinity was not considered to be a belief of the SDA Church. Washburn said it was "seeking to intrude its evil presence" into the teachings of our church. Washburn also wrote in his letter (paragraphs not contiguous)

> "That papal doctrine of the Trinity destroys the Gospel and leaves us without hope, for it compelled its defender, Elder Prescott, to deny that great scripture truth, that the Son of God died for the sins of the world. Any doctrine that leads a man to deny that the Son of God died must be an evil doctrine, an anti-Christian doctrine, not from God but from Satan…. The Trinity doctrine like its author, Satan, is a destroyer; a bungling absurd irreverent caricature, a blasphemous burlesque on the glorious free unity of heart and purpose and perfect almighty love and creative life of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." *(ibid)*

> "Seventh-day Adventists claim to take the word of God as supreme authority and to have "come out of Babylon," to have renounced forever the vain traditions of Rome. If we should go back to the immortality of the soul, purgatory, eternal torment and the Sunday Sabbath, would that be anything less than apostasy? If, however, we leap over all these minor, secondary doctrines and accept and teach the very central root, doctrine of Romanism, the Trinity, and teach that the son of God did not die, even though our words seem to be spiritual, is this anything else or anything less than apostasy? and the very Omega of apostasy?" *(ibid)*

Washburn's main objection to the orthodox trinity doctrine was that it denied that the divine Son of God died at Calvary. Running a close second was that it denied that in the making of the decision for Christ to become incarnate, a risk was taken concerning His existence. In expressing this objection, he wrote

> "When Jesus came to this world as a human being, he took the same risk that every man faces, the "risk of failure and eternal loss." It was possible for Jesus to fail, to fall into sin and to be lost. I quote one of the most beautiful, pathetic statements found in the Spirit of Prophecy. Desire of Ages, page 49: "Into the world where Satan claimed dominion God permitted His Son to come, a helpless babe subject to humanity. He permitted Him to meet life's peril in common with every human soul, to fight the battle as very child must fight it at the risk of failure and eternal loss." *(ibid)*

After again quoting Ellen White where she said that there was a risk to Christ's existence, he explained

> "If Christ, as was possible, had suffered "failure and eternal loss," if the Trinity doctrine that Christ was "one person" with the Father is true, then the Father would also have been lost, and the universe annihilated. This whole beautiful passage indicates as separate a personality for the Heavenly Father and His Son, as of any earthly father and son.
>
> The whole Trinity doctrine is utterly foreign to all the Bible and the teachings of the Spirit of Prophecy. Revelation gives not the slightest hint of it. This monstrous heathen conception finds no place in all the free universe of our Blessed Heavenly Father and His Son, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ." *(ibid)*

So Washburn's objection to the trinity doctrine was the same as mine. He knew it denied that the divine person of the Son of God died at Calvary, also that it denies there was ever a risk to His eternal existence, and as we have seen, because these latter beliefs were taught by early SDAs, they too would have rejected what is taught today by those who espouse orthodox trinity theology. Notice very importantly that Washburn does not mention the Holy Spirit – only the Father and the Son.

Having said that, Washburn did believe that the Holy Spirit is a person. He explained (paragraphs not contiguous)

> "The three distinct, separate persons of the Godhead were present at the baptism of Jesus, who, when coming out of the water, heard the Father's voice proclaiming, "This is my beloved son," and the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove, in divine benediction. The Father, the first person of the three, spoke from Heaven of his son, the second person, and the Holy Spirit, the third person of the three, confirmed the word of the Father that Jesus was the beloved Son of God. Here are the three distinct persons that the Spirit of Prophecy calls the "Heavenly trio." Series B, No. 7, page 62." *(ibid)*
>
> "Christ himself teaches in John 17:21, 22 that the three persons of the Godhead are three "separable beings." For the disciples were "separable beings," and Christ compares the unity of the Father and the Son with the unity of the disciples united in perfect unity of heart. Thus this statement of Elder Prescott's is absolutely contrary to John 17:21, 22, and I Corinthians 1:10." *(ibid)*

So why did Washburn appeal to John 17:21-22 to show that "the three persons of the Godhead are three "separable beings" when in fact these verses only mention the Father and the Son. It was because Prescott, in his sermon, had said the three were not separable. Quoting from page 8 of the record of Prescott's sermon, Washburn noted that Prescott had said (quoting Prescott)

> "We cannot regard the three persons of the Godhead as separable beings, each one dwelling in and confined to a visible body the same as three human beings. There are three persons in the Godhead but they are so mysteriously and indissolubly related to each other that the presence of each one is equivalent to the presence of the others." *(ibid)*

Washburn's objection was that Prescott had referred to the persons of the Godhead as "indissolubly related to each other". Washburn could see the implications of such a teaching. He believed two were separable (Father and Son). He concluded

> "This is the doctrine of the Trinity as expressed in the statement already quoted from the sermon, page 1, that the three, Father, Son and Holy Ghost are "ONE PERSON." He states that they are NOT distinct separate persons but "One Person" and "that the presence of each one is equivalent to the presence of the others." *(ibid)*

What we can see very clearly is that Washburn regarded the Holy Spirit as a person. This though did not stop him refuting the belief that God is a trinity as depicted by the trinity doctrine. This again is the irrefutable realisation that just because someone accepts the Holy Spirit as a person (or a being), this does not automatically mean that this individual accepts the trinity doctrine. That is saying two different things. It depends upon what a person means by 'the trinity', also what is believed about the Holy Spirit being a person.

The entire point of Washburn's objection to the trinity doctrine is that (a) it denies that a divine person died at Calvary, and (b) it denies that there ever was a risk to Christ's existence as the divine Son of God. In other words, Washburn regarded the trinity doctrine as destroying the gospel.

Interestingly, Prescott claimed that what Washburn had written in his letter was a "misinterpretation" of his "teaching" on the "Doctrine of the Trinity". *(Prescott to Washburn, April 25th 1940)*

The case of Ellen G. White

We noted at the beginning of this article that one of my reasons for writing it is to dispel the reasoning that just because someone refers to the Holy Spirit as a person or a being, this is not, in itself, proof that this person is a trinitarian. This, I believe, is something I have successfully achieved.

Ellen White is a classic example. We know at times she referred to the Holy Spirit as a person, yet because she believed that Christ, if he had sinned, would have gone out of existence, this would prohibit her being labelled a trinitarian. This is because in trinitarian theology, this risk belief is prohibited. Even so, there are those who still insist on trying to make it look as though she was a trinitarian – and they do this by selectively quoting from her writings. They will choose statements she made that would fit into a trinitarian concept of God, while ignoring statements that do not. This is not a correct way to understand what God revealed through Ellen White.

Those who attempt to make Ellen White look as though she was supporting trinity theology, usually quote from a testimony in which she was warning our physicians and ministry not to be deceived by John Harvey Kellogg. Kellogg had told A. G. Daniells, then the GC President, that he had come to believe in "the trinity", which at that time (1903) was not something generally believed by SDAs. Daniells explained to W. C. White concerning Kellogg

> "He then stated that his former views regarding the trinity had stood in his way of making a clear and absolutely correct statement but that within a short time he had come to believe in the trinity and could now see pretty clearly where all the difficulty was and believed that he could clear up the matter satisfactorily. "He told me that he now believed in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost and his view was that it was God the Holy Ghost and not God the Father that filled all space and every living thing." *(Letter, A. G. Daniells to W. C. White Oct 29th 1903)*

In *Special Testimonies Series B, No 7, Come out and be Separate* (this is where Ellen White wrote that there are "three living persons of the heavenly trio"), Ellen White, in condemning Kellogg's beliefs, quoted from what was then a very popular book. In fact it was a major international success. It was called *The Higher Christian Life*. She had this book in her library. Its author was the Rev William Boardman (1810-1886). He had ministered in the Presbyterian and Congregational churches. It is said that Boardman's book was the inspiration for the 'Holy Living' evangelical conventions that began their life at Keswick (UK) in 1875. These conventions continue to be held there even today.

Boardman, in his book, had given full support to the trinity doctrine. In so doing, he had used the type of 3 in 1 illustrations that trinitarians often use to describe God as depicted by the trinity doctrine. As we shall now see, not only did Ellen White quote these illustrations, but she also condemned them. Here is what she wrote in this testimony.

> "I am instructed to say, The sentiments of those who are searching for advanced scientific ideas are not to be trusted." *(Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Series B, No 7, page 63, 'Come out and be separate')*

This is very important. Ellen White is saying here that what she was about to write was not her message but God's message. She was simply the messenger. She refers to "advanced scientific ideas", denoting I would say, ideas that are beyond that which is revealed in scripture. She continued (quoting the 3 in 1 illustrations Boardman had used)

> "Such representations as the following are made: "The Father is as the light invisible; the Son is as the light embodied; the Spirit is the light shed abroad." "The Father is like the dew, invisible vapor; the Son is like the dew gathered in beauteous form; the Spirit is like the dew fallen to the seat of life." Another representation: "The Father is like the invisible vapor; the Son is like the leaden cloud; the Spirit is rain fallen and working in refreshing power." *(ibid)*

Trinitarians use this type of three-in-one illustration (such as shell + albumen + yolk = 1 egg) to depict God as in the trinity doctrine. She continued

> "All these spiritualistic representations are simply nothingness. They are imperfect, untrue. They weaken and diminish the Majesty which no earthly likeness can be compared to. God can not be compared with the things His hands have made. These are mere earthly things, suffering under the curse of God because of the sins of man. The Father can not be described by the things of earth." *(ibid)*

According to Ellen White, God condemns these three-in-one illustrations. She said that not only are they untrue, but also that they weaken and diminish God's majesty. Boardman freely admitted that these illustrations were imperfect, but he did say that they serve to depict the official relationship of each divine person to the other two. God obviously disagrees with him. Boardman followed on from these illustrations by saying

> "THE FATHER is ALL THE FULNESS OF THE GODHEAD INVISIBLE.
>
> THE SON is ALL THE FULNESS OF THE GODHEAD MANIFESTED.
>
> THE SPIRIT is ALL THE FULNESS OF THE GODHEAD MAKING MANIFEST." *(Rev. W. Boardman, The Higher Christian Life, page 105)*

Ellen White elaborated on Boardman's words by writing

> "The Father is all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and is invisible to mortal sight.
>
> The Son is all the fulness of the Godhead manifested. The Word of God declares Him to be "the express image of His person." "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Here is shown the personality of the Father."
>
> The Comforter that Christ promised to send after He ascended to heaven, is the Spirit in all the fulness of the Godhead, making manifest the power of divine grace to all who receive and believe in Christ as a personal Saviour." *(Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Series B, No 7, page 63, 'Come out and be Separate')*

First of all, notice very importantly that as did Boardman, Ellen White said that "the Father **is** all the fulness of the Godhead", also that "the Son **is** all the fulness of the Godhead", but when it came to the Holy Spirit, she did not say, as did Boardman, that "the spirit **is** all the fullness of the Godhead making manifest" but instead said "The Comforter that Christ promised to send…is the Spirit **in** all the fulness of the Godhead making manifest". She did not say the same for all three persons. She avoided saying, as would a trinitarian, that each of the three persons **is** all the fullness of the Godhead – which leads them to say 'God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit' (as did Kellogg). Ellen White must have seen an important difference here – else why change it?

Notice too that Boardman said that the Father was "invisible". Ellen White said differently. She said the Father "is invisible to mortal sight" – which is saying two entirely different things. She then made another change from what Boardman had written, and this one is extremely important. Boardman wrote

> "The persons are not mere offices, or modes of revelation, but living persons of the living God." *(Rev. W. Boardman, The Higher Christian Life, page 105)*

This is trinity theology. It goes further than saying there are three divine persons of the Godhead. It says that together they constitute the one "living God". It was at this point that Ellen White did something that is very important to note. In fact it is crucial. Instead of saying, as did Boardman, that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were "living persons of the living God", which is a decidedly trinitarian statement, she wrote

> "There are three living persons of the heavenly trio;" *(Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Series B, No 7, page 63, 'Come out and be separate')*

Did you notice what Ellen White did? She deliberately removed from Boardman's statement the trinitarian aspect of it. If Ellen White had been upholding, and teaching, trinity theology, she could have quoted Boardman's words just as he had written them. Instead, she deliberately removed from his statement the very thing that had made it trinitarian. To those who are seeking the truth concerning the present trinity controversy within the SDA Church, this should be of paramount importance.

Apart from this, in this testimony condemning Kellogg's views of God, Ellen White purposely quoted three-in-one illustrations from a book that was upholding the trinity doctrine – and then condemned them. All of this should tell us that Ellen White, although not using the word 'trinity', was condemning trinity theology. She condemned the idea that all three, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, constituted the one living God as depicted by the trinity doctrine, also by these three-in-one illustrations.

Ellen White could not, as some have suggested, have simply been addressing Kellogg's God in nature idea. If she had been, why quote the three-in-one trinity illustrations from Boardman's book that he was using in support of the trinity doctrine? So those who use Ellen White's writings in support of trinitarianism – especially where she wrote in the above testimony, "There are three living persons of the heavenly trio" – which in reality shows she was denying trinity theology - are very much misusing what she wrote, and as we can clearly see, there is far more to trinitarianism than confessing the Holy Spirit to be a person.

Ellen G. White: The personality of the Son of God

It would me amiss of me to omit what Ellen White wrote about Christ being God's Son, so I will share here some of the things she wrote.

As we know, during the time of her ministry, the belief held across the board by SDAs was that Christ, in the immeasurable ages of eternity before anything was created, was begotten (brought forth) of God's own substance therefore He is truly the Son of God. Needless to say, this was something that Ellen White fully realised yet never did she say to these early SDAs that what they believed and were teaching was not biblical. In fact in 1893 when what we believed about Christ was being challenged, she gave her full support to it.

In a letter addressed to the brethren in America, which was eventually published in the *Review and Herald* (she was in New Zealand at the time), she spoke of a man in New Zealand, a schoolteacher, who claimed that SDAs did not believe in the divinity of Christ. Here is what she said about this encounter.

> "This man may not have known what our faith is on this point, but he was not left in ignorance. He was informed that there is not a people on earth who hold more firmly to the truth of Christ's pre-existence than do Seventh-day Adventists." *(Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 5th December 1893, 'An Appeal for the Australasian Field')*

This is a categorical statement. Any SDA reading it would have concluded that what they were then teaching about the pre-existence of Christ was correct. What else could they have believed from reading it?

Two years later she further confirmed SDAs in their beliefs. This was when she wrote in the *Signs of the Times*

> "A complete offering has been made; for "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son,"-- not a son by creation, as were the angels, nor a son by adoption, as is the forgiven sinner, but a Son begotten in the express image of the Father's person, and in all the brightness of his majesty and glory, one equal with God in authority, dignity, and divine perfection. In him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." *(Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 30th May 1895)*

SDAs across the board would have agreed 100% with what Ellen White said here. It was exactly what they were teaching. Six weeks later she restated this belief by saying

> "The Eternal Father, the unchangeable one, gave his only begotten Son, tore from his bosom Him who was made in the express image of his person, and sent him down to earth to reveal how greatly he loved mankind." *(Ellen G. White, Review & Herald 9th July 1895 'The Duty of the Minister and the People')*

In the previous statement, Ellen White said of Christ that He was *"*a Son begotten in the express image of the Father's person", while in this latter statement she said he was "made in the express image of his [the Father's] person". This begetting (bringing forth) took place in eternity when only God existed. Christ therefore would have been begotten (brought forth) of God's very own being - of God's very own substance.

Some have attempted to make it look as though in this last statement, Ellen White was referring to Christ's birth in Bethlehem, meaning that this was when He was "made in the express image" of His Father's person, but as can be seen, this would not be a possible understanding of what she wrote. As she confirmed by explaining to the SDA youth in the year 1900

> "Before Christ came in the likeness of men, he existed in the express image of his Father". *(Ellen G. White, Youth's Instructor, 20th December 1900 'Christ's humiliation")*

Christ therefore, from eternity, was "the express image" of His Father's person.

So as we can see, Ellen White was in agreement with what her fellow SDAs were then teaching about Christ being begotten of God in eternity, but as of yet I have never found where she actually said that His personality had a beginning – at least not in those exact words. What she did say was (referring to Jesus saying, "Before Abraham was, I am" John 8:58)

> "Here Christ shows them that, altho they might reckon His life to be less than fifty years, yet His divine life could not be reckoned by human computation. The existence of Christ before His incarnation is not measured by figures." *(Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 3rd May 1899, 'The Word made flesh')*

This could be taken as strongly implying that Christ's personality did have a beginning – which would be in keeping with where she said that SDA's, at that time, were teaching the truth about Christ's pre-existence. Six years later she wrote

> "The Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of the Father, is truly God in infinity, but not in personality." *(Ellen G. White, Ms 116, December 19th 1905, 'An Entire Consecration')*

No trinitarian would make such a confession. Ellen White was not a trinitarian.

Ellen G. White: The death of the divine Son of God

After seeing that Ellen White said that when the divine Son of God chose to become incarnate, a risk was taken concerning His eternal existence (see pages 13-15), there should be no trouble in believing that she said He died at Calvary. For those though who may be sceptical about this, or believe she said He did not really die, I will offer here some of her statements where she said He did die. I will not comment on these statements individually because they speak for themselves, suffice to say that just like her 'risk' statements, this proves she was not a trinitarian. This is because trinitarians do not believe that the divine Son of God died at Calvary.

I am offering here only a very small sample of her statements. There are many more saying the same thing although worded slightly differently. Very importantly, please note the ellipses denoting omitted text. In order to save space, I have greatly condensed these statements.

"In order to realize the value of redemption, it is necessary to understand what it cost. We should take broader and deeper views of the life, sufferings, and death of God's dear Son. A limited idea of the sacrifice made in our behalf leads many to place a low estimate upon the great work of the atonement…[John 3:16 quoted]. The love of God in giving his Son to die for a fallen race, amazed the holy angels." *(Ellen G. White, Present Truth (British), 19th November 1885, 'The Sufferings of Christ')*

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"Satan is determined that men shall not see the love of God, which led him to give his only begotten Son to save the lost race; for it is the goodness of God that leads men to repentance." *(Ellen White, Review and Herald, 20th March 1894, 'Christ the center of the message')*

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"Men need to understand that the Deity suffered under the agonies of Calvary. The Majesty of heaven was made to suffer at the hands of wicked men….Men claiming to be the children of Abraham worked out the wrath of Satan upon the innocent Son of the infinite God." *(Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 14th April 1899,'After the camp meeting)*

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"The love of the Father toward a fallen race is unfathomable, indescribable, without a parallel. This love led him to consent to give his only begotten Son to die, that rebellious man might be brought into harmony with the government of Heaven, and be saved from the penalty of his transgression. …God permitted his beloved Son, full of grace and truth, to come from a world of indescribable glory to a world marred and blighted with sin, shadowed with the shadow of death and the curse. He permitted him to leave the bosom of his love, the adoration of the angels, to suffer shame, insult, humiliation, hatred, and death." *(Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, February 28th, 1888, 'Our High Calling')*

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"God permitted His beloved Son, full of grace and truth, to come from a world of indescribable glory to a world marred and blighted with sin, shadowed with the shadow of death and the curse. He permitted Him to leave the home of His love, the adoration of the angels, to suffer shame, insult, humiliation, hatred, and death." *(Ellen G. White, Bible Training School, March 1st 1908, 'Wonderful love')*

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"A council was held in Heaven, which resulted in God's dear Son undertaking to redeem man from the curse and from the disgrace of Adam's failure, and to conquer Satan." (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 24th February 1874, Redemption No. 1)*

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"The divine Son of God was fainting, dying. The Father sent a messenger from His presence to strengthen the divine Sufferer and brace Him to tread His bloodstained path. Could mortals have viewed the amazement and the sorrow of the angelic host as they watched in silent grief the Father separating His beams of light, love, and glory from the beloved Son of His bosom, they would better understand how offensive sin is in His sight. The sword of justice was now to awake against His dear Son." (*Ellen G. White, Testimonies Volume 2, page 206)*

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"The divine Son of God was the only sacrifice of suffficient value to fully satisfy the claims of God's perfect law." *(Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 17th December 1872, 'The First Advent of Christ')*

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"If we would be duly impressed with the value of souls, we must oft look to Calvary and see the dying Son of the infinite God giving up His life for a lost world. We must look and contemplate how He estimated man." *(Ellen G. White, Letter 44 1892, to Bro and Sis Wessels, November 7th 1892)*

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"For the purpose of redeeming a lost world, the divine Son of God had endured the cross, despising the shame, and had ascended to heaven triumphant over death and the grave." *(Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 16th November 1911, see also Acts of the Apostles page 436)*

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"The heavens grew dark, the earth was rent when he [Jesus] cried in agony, hanging between two thieves, and dying as a malefactor. And who was he?--He was the Majesty of heaven, the divine Son of God." *(Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 9th February 1891, 'Faith manifested by works")*

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"Pilate's wife was not a Jew; but the angel of God had sent this warning to her, that, through her, Pilate might be prevented from committing the terrible crime of delivering up to death the divine Son of God." *(Ellen G. White, Volume 3 Spirit of Prophecy, page 141, 'Condemnation of Jesus')*

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*"*The plan of salvation had been laid before the creation of the earth; for Christ is a lamb "foreordained before the foundation of the world"; yet it was a struggle, even with the King of the universe, to yield up His Son to die for the guilty race." (E*llen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, page 63, 'The Plan of Redemption')*

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"Three times He [Jesus] was shut in by the glorious light about the Father, and the third time He came from the Father we could see His person. …He then made known to the angelic choir that a way of escape had been made for lost man; that He had been pleading with His Father, and had obtained permission to give His own life as a ransom for the race, to bear their sins, and take the sentence of death upon Himself…Then joy, inexpressible joy, filled heaven, and the heavenly choir sang a song of praise and adoration. They touched their harps and sang a note higher than they had done before, because of the great mercy and condescension of God in yielding up His dearly Beloved to die for a race of rebels…. The transgression was so great that an angel's life would not pay the debt. Nothing but the death and intercession of God's Son would pay the debt and save lost man from hopeless sorrow and misery*." (Ellen G. White, Early Writings, Pages 126-127, 1882)*

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"Only by the gift of God's Son could the ransom of the human race be obtained … the only-begotten Son of God humbled Himself to come to this earth. He took the sinner's place; the guiltless suffered for the guilty. … God accepted the death of His Son to save a rebellious race*. (Ellen G. White. Signs of the Times, 22nd February 1899, 'The measure of God's love')*

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"If Christ had studied his convenience, he would never have left heaven to come to our world to die…." *(Ellen G. White, Review & Herald, 10th June 1890, 'Conditions for Obtaining Eternal Riches')*

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*"*Jesus left heaven, laid aside his glory, left the communion and adoration of the sinless angels, **a**nd for our sake humbled himself, even to the death of the cross*." (Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 22nd December 1890, 'Are We Representatives of Christ?')*

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"The chief priests and elders revile God's dear Son while in his expiring agonies. Yet inanimate nature groans in sympathy with her bleeding, dying Author."*(Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times. 21st August 1879 'The Sufferings of Christ')*

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*"*Christ, the Majesty of heaven, the King of glory, was dead." (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald 28th December 1897 'He was Wounded for our Transgressions')*

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They [the angels] could only behold in amazement their loved Commander suffering the penalty of man's transgression of the Father's law." *(Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times. 21st August 1879 'The Sufferings of Christ')*

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"But the Son of God, who was with the Father before the world was, took pity upon us in our lost condition, and offered to step in between us and the wrath of an offended God. Said Jesus, I will give my life for them…..God consented to give his only Son to die for lost man." *(Ellen G. White, Youth's Instructor, August 1st 1856, 'Salvation through Christ')*

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"You have robbed God of the service due Him the many years of your life, thus showing great ingratitude to your Creator who has been so profuse in His gifts to you. You have slighted His dear Son, whom He gave up from His bosom to die for the guilty race." *(Ellen G. White, Ms 23 1868, 'The Case of Asa Green', Circa January 5th 1868)*

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"The night wore slowly away, and while it was yet dark, the watching angels knew that the time for the release of God's dear Son, their loved Commander, had nearly come." *(Ellen G. White, Early Writings, page 181, 'Spiritual Gifts', 1882)*

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"The law cannot lower the standard or take less than its full demands, therefore it cannot cleanse us from one sin; but God's Son, who is one with the Father, equal in authority with the Father, paid the debt for us." *(Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 29th July 1890)*

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"Think of how much it cost Christ to leave the heavenly courts, and take his position at the head of humanity. Why did he do this? -- Because he was the only one who could redeem the fallen race." *(Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 9th March 1905, 'God's purpose for us')*

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"The angels prostrated themselves before Him. They offered their lives. Jesus said to them that He would by His death save many, that the life of an angel could not pay the debt. His life alone could be accepted of His Father as a ransom for man … They touched their harps and sang a note higher than they had done before, for the great mercy and condescension of God in yielding up His dearly Beloved to die for a race of rebels." *(Ellen G. White, Early Writings, Spiritual Gifts, Pages 150-1, 1882)*

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"Since the divine law is as sacred as God Himself, only one equal with God could make atonement for its transgression. None but Christ could redeem fallen man from the curse of the law…Christ would take upon Himself the guilt and shame of sin--sin so offensive to a holy God that it must separate the Father and the Son." *(Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, page 63, 'The Plan of Redemption')*

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"A divine person alone could mediate between God and man." *(Ellen G. White, Youth's Instructor, 31st August 1887, 'Search the Scriptures')*

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"Peter was naturally forward and impulsive, and Satan had taken advantage of these characteristics to lead him astray…. He could not conceive it possible that the Son of God should be put to death. Satan suggested to his mind that if Jesus was the Son of God he could not die." *(Ellen G. White, Spirit of Prophecy, Volume 3 page 231, 'Jesus at Galilee' 1878)*

After reading these statements, no conclusion can be drawn other than Ellen White consistently made clear that the pre-existent divine Son of God did die at Calvary. How else can they be interpreted?

Who or what died at Calvary? Objections answered

Amongst SDAs today, there are those, usually the trinitarians, who in attempting to 'prove' that Ellen White wrote in favour of the trinity doctrine (trinity theology) misuse certain statements where she writes about who and what died at Calvary. They need to do this because trinitarians do not believe that a divine person did die at Calvary. So to make her appear a trinitarian, she must be made to look as though she said He did not die. We shall look at these 'misused' statements now. As we do so, we need to bear in mind, as we have seen above, that she said that the divine Son of God did die. Perhaps the most misused statement is this one (the highlighted part)

"I am the resurrection, and the life." He who had said, "I lay down my life, that I might take it again," came forth from the grave to life that was in himself. Humanity died: divinity did not die. In his divinity, Christ possessed the power to break the bonds of death. He declares that he has life in himself to quicken whom he will." *(Ellen G. White, Youth's Instructor, 4th August 1898, and 3rd January 1905)*

Context here is crucial. Here Ellen White is comparing the two natures of the incarnate divine Son of God - the human and the divine. She is saying "Humanity died: divinity did not die". The "divinity" here referred to is Christ's divine nature – NOT His personage. As the context reveals, this divinity (that did not die) is referring to the "life that was in himself" (see John 5:26). Each nature was not a person. The two natures were blended to form *one person* – the incarnate divine Son of God. The word "divinity" here therefore is NOT referring to a divine person. Those who use it this way are 'forcing' Ellen White to contradict herself (contradict all the statements we have seen above where she said the divine Son of God did die). Here she is simply contrasting human nature with divine nature. She is saying that "In His divinity", meaning in His divine nature, He "possessed the power to break the bonds of death".

Jesus did have two natures – one divine and one human. Where people become confused is that they believe each nature is a person, but this is not so. As Ellen White explained

> "Was the human nature of the Son of Mary changed into the divine nature of the Son of God? No; the two natures were mysteriously blended in one person -- the Man Christ Jesus. In Him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." *(Ellen G. White, September 3rd 1904, Letter 280a to 'Ministers, Physicians, and Teachers')*

This "one person" is Jesus. He is the incarnate divine Son of God. Each nature was not a person. Perhaps this is understood better when the following is read. It is taken from an article called *The Word made flesh* that Ellen White wrote in 1906.

> "By his obedience to all the commandments of God, Christ wrought out a redemption for man. This was not done by going out of himself to another, but by taking humanity into himself." *(Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 5th April 1906, 'The Word made Flesh')*

When becoming incarnate, Christ did not put Himself into a human body. Instead, He took humanity (human nature) "into" His divine personage. Thus, instead of being a person of one nature, He became a person of two natures.

Here is another of the misused statements from the writings of Ellen White. Again it is the part highlighted in red that is usually misused. Like the previous one, it is often removed from its context – which is in fact the penultimate statement we looked at where Ellen White said the two natures were blended in one person. Here is the statement in its context

> "Was the human nature of the Son of Mary changed into the divine nature of the Son of God? No; the two natures were mysteriously blended in one person—the Man Christ Jesus. In Him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. When Christ was crucified, it was His human nature that died. Deity did not sink and die; that would have been impossible. … The Saviour has purchased the fallen race with His own blood." *(Ellen G. White, September 3rd 1904, Letter 280a to 'Ministers, Physicians and Teachers')*

As can be seen, the context is again the two natures of Christ. The statement "Deity did not sink and die" must be understood in that context. When this is done, it is easy to see that Ellen White was NOT referring to Deity as a divine person but to Deity as a nature (divine nature). Read the statement again if you are not sure what I mean. She is comparing deity (divine nature) with "human nature". As she said "it was His human nature that died. Deity did not sink and die; that would have been impossible". This statement then falls into line with all we have seen above where she wrote that a divine person did die at Calvary. As she said (see above)

> "Men need to understand that the Deity suffered under the agonies of Calvary. The Majesty of heaven was made to suffer at the hands of wicked men." *(Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 14th April 1899,'After the camp meeting)*

The two statements therefore – "divinity did not die" and "Deity did not sink and die" –, are not contradictory to, but complimentary to, all we have seen above that Ellen White said about the divine person of the Son of God dying at Calvary.

Those who say that it was possible for Christ to have raised Himself from death, are completely at odds with what we have been told here through the spirit of prophecy

> *"*He who died for the sins of the world was to remain in the tomb for the allotted time. He was in that stony prison house as a prisoner of divine justice, and he was responsible to the Judge of the universe. He was bearing the sins of the world, and his Father only could release him." *(Ellen G. White, Youth's Instructor, 2nd May 1901, 'The Lord is Risen')*

In this statement there is no 'wiggle room' in order to show that Christ could have raised Himself from death. Ellen White says clearly, "his Father *only* could release him". This is why she also said:

> *"*To the honor and glory of God, His beloved Son -- the Surety, the Substitute -- was delivered up and descended into the prisonhouse of the grave. The new tomb enclosed Him in its rocky chambers. If one single sin had tainted His character the stone would never have been rolled away from the door of His rocky chamber, and the world with its burden of guilt would have perished." *(Ellen G. White, Ms. 81, 1893, Diary entry for Sunday, July 2nd, 1893, Wellington, New Zealand)*

This was the risk that was taken. Christ could have sinned, and if He had sinned, His Father would not have called Him from the grave. Him, as well as us, would have been lost forever. As I said at the beginning of this article, this shows just how much God loves us. He loves us so much that He was willing to give up His only begotten Son forever.

The lesson that needs to be learned in all of this is that *context* is very important, just as it is also important to take on board *all* that Ellen White wrote, and not be selective with certain of her statements. Using some of her statements, while purposely omitting other things she wrote on the very same subject, is not the way to teach others what God has revealed through her. In fact, to do such a thing is being dishonest.

It may seem quite illogical to believe that a divine person did die at Calvary, but we should not try to work out in every little detail how this was achieved. As Ellen White went on to say in Letter 280a 1904 from which we have just quoted

> "This is a great mystery, a mystery that will not be fully, completely, understood in its greatness until the translation of the redeemed shall take place. Then the power and greatness and efficacy of the gift of God to man will be understood. But the enemy is determined that this gift shall be so mystified that it will become a nothingness."*(Ellen G. White, September 3rd 1904, Letter 280a to 'Ministers, Physicians and Teachers')*

What we can accept though is that as Ellen White said, a divine person did die at Calvary, even though the precise mechanics of how it was achieved remains somewhat of a mystery to us. in a letter in 1898 (this was the same year as *The Desire of Ages* was published), Ellen White did explain a little of how it was achieved. She wrote

> "Jesus Christ laid off His royal robe, His kingly crown, and clothed His divinity with humanity, in order to become a substitute and surety for humanity, that dying in humanity, He might by His death destroy him who had the power of death. He could not have done this as God, but by coming as man, Christ could die." *(Ellen G. White, Letter 97, to 'My brethren in North Fitzroy', November 18th 1898)*

Unfortunately, the trinitarians among us say exactly the opposite. They say that even though the divine Son of God did become a man, He still could not die. This is a denial of what God has revealed to us through the spirit of prophecy. Ellen White though made it very clear so there is no misunderstanding

> "When he closed his eyes in death upon the cross, the soul of Christ did not go at once to Heaven, as many believe, or how could his words be true--"I am not yet ascended to my Father"? The spirit of Jesus slept in the tomb with his body, and did not wing its way to Heaven, there to maintain a separate existence, and to look down upon the mourning disciples embalming the body from which it had taken flight." *(Ellen G. White, Vol. 3 Spirit of Prophecy page 203, 'The women at the tomb' 1878)*

From the above we can see that Ellen White would not have agreed with trinitarian theology. She believed that the pre-existent divine Son of God did die at Calvary, also that in the making of the decision to become incarnate, a risk was taken regarding His eternal existence. There is no denying these things. Whether a person chooses to believe her or not is something else. That is a matter of individual choice. We each need to answer to God personally for what we believe and teach.

Some may ask how Ellen White's words are in keeping with where Jesus said that He would raise His human body from death (John 2:19) – which is a fair question. The way I reason it is this: As we noted above, Jesus was a man of two natures - one divine and one human. We also noted that divine nature cannot die, so when the Father called Jesus from His sleep in the grave (see Desire of Ages page 779) He awoke in His divine nature (that cannot die), and then He was able to raise His human body. As we noted previously, Ellen White, quoting Jesus, wrote:

> "I am the resurrection, and the life." He who had said, "I lay down my life, that I might take it again," came forth from the grave to life that was in himself. Humanity died: divinity did not die. In his divinity, Christ possessed the power to break the bonds of death. He declares that he has life in himself to quicken whom he will. (*Ellen G. White, Youth's Instructor, 4th August 1898 and 3rd January 1905)*

In the *Desire of Ages,* we find these words:

> "When the voice of the mighty angel was heard at Christ's tomb, saying, Thy Father calls Thee, the Saviour came forth from the grave by the life that was in Himself. Now was proved the truth of His words, "I lay down My life, that I might take it again.... I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." Now was fulfilled the prophecy He had spoken to the priests and rulers, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." John 10:17, 18; 2:19" *(Ellen G. White, Desire of Ages, page 785, 'The Lord is Risen')*

Confirmation of current SDA trinity theology

In 2007 when attempting to establish exactly what was believed by our trinitarian leadership, I asked Dr, Canale, who had written the treatise *Doctrine of God* in the *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, how it was possible to align this risk belief concerning Christ with the current trinitarian theology of SDAs. He replied

"Dear Terry:

Thank you for reading the treatise on the Docrine [sic] of God. God the son could have sinned but he would not have lost his existence. I do not know where you got the idea that sin would have brought the death of the eternal Son of God. God, because he is God cannot die. Humans can die. Sin in Christ would have determined death for all humans, and would have affected the life of the Son and the trinity in ways we cannot comprehend but will not have cause the death of the Son and change the Trinitarian structure of God's Being.

I hope this helps

Cordially

Fernando Canale" *(Dr Canale, email to Terry Hill, 14th September 2007)*

As a trinitarian, Dr. Canale obviously denies there was a risk taken concerning the eternal existence of the divine Son of God. Notice he said he did not know where I got the idea from that He could die. As I said at the very beginning of this article, this is a belief I had held from the beginning of my Christian experience, which I discovered was confirmed to be true through the writings of Ellen White. We are told in Scripture regarding the divine Son of God

"For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham."…"For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Hebrew 2:17, 4:15

If the incarnate divine Son of God was "in all points tempted like as we are", then it must have been with the possibility of sinning. If this was not possible, then He was not "in all points tempted like as we are". In fact if He could not have sinned, then all of His temptations were a farce.

If the incarnate Son of God had sinned, God would have held Him responsible for His actions. This is the same as He does with all of us. As the apostle Peter said, "God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34). If He had sinned, He and us would have reaped the consequence – which would be the second death (eternal oblivion). In answer to Dr. Canale therefore: It was from the Bible I obtained my belief that if the incarnate Son of God had sinned He would have been lost forever. As the Scriptures tell us

"The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him." Ezekiel 18:20

This passage of Scripture is referring to personal responsibility, while the death it refers to ("The soul that sinneth, it shall die") includes the second death from which there is no resurrection to eternal life. As Ellen White explained

"The sinner is not immortal; for God has said, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." This means all that it expresses. It reaches farther than the death which is common to all; it means the second death." *(Ellen White, Signs of the Times, April 8th 1897, 'Christ the Life Giver')*

As we noted above, we have also been told through the SOP

> "If one single sin had tainted His character the stone would never have been rolled away from the door of His rocky chamber, and the world with its burden of guilt would have perished." *(Ellen G. White, Ms. 81 1893, Diary entry for Sunday, July 2nd 1893, Wellington, New Zealand)*

In a later email on this same subject, Dr. Canale expanded his thoughts by saying

> "The idea that Christ will not have resurrected if he had sinned seems contradictory to the fact that he has life in itself. By definition the divinity cannot cease to exist, or to be the fountain of life." *(Dr Fernando Canale, email to Terry Hill, September 16th 2007)*

It is true that the divine *nature* cannot cease to exist. It is immortal. The divine Son of God though, as a separate person from God, surrendered Himself (His divine personage) to His human nature. This is how He could die. As we also noted above:

> "He could not have done this as God, but by coming as man, Christ could die." *(Ellen G. White, Letter 97, to 'My brethren in North Fitzroy', November 18th 1898)*

Here is an interesting and illuminating thought from the spirit of prophecy that will help us to understand these things:

> "Wondrous combination of man and God! He might have helped his human nature to withstand the inroads of disease by pouring from his divine nature vitality and undecaying vigour to the human. But he humbled himself to man's nature." …What humility was this! It amazed angels. The tongue can never describe it; the imagination cannot take it in. The eternal Word consented to be made flesh! God became man! It was a wonderful humility! *(Ellen G. White, Review & Herald 5th July 1887 'Christ man's example')*

The next month, Dr Canale replied to me concerning who and what died at Calvary

> "I believe the incarnated Son of God died. I also believe that if he would have sin [sic] he will not have resurrected. His death, the death of the incarnated Christ would have been eternal. Yet, I do not believe that this implies the death of the divine Second Person of the Trinity." *(Dr Fernando Canale, email to Terry Hill, 8th October 2007)*

This is trying to separate (divorce) the person of the divine Son of God from His humanity (meaning they are two separable things). This is the same as saying that whatever the incarnate Son of God did, it would not affect the existence of the divine Son of God.

This is trinitarian reasoning. It is no different than saying that the divine person of the Son of God was only dwelling in the human Christ, and that He did not actually become flesh, meaning that the divine Son of God could be separated from His humanity. Ellen White though made this comment:

> "But the priests and rulers failed to realize that in Christ divinity was enthroned in humanity. Christ's humanity could not be separated from His divinity." *(Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, April 14th 1898, 'Christ and the Law')*

In 2010, when commenting on my risk belief, Dr. Canale wrote to me saying:

> "The way I read your views, I see you sharing with early Adventist Arrian views. Although you may disagree with that, I think you are incline to accept this way of interpreting Scriptural text because of your conviction that had Christ sinned he would [not] have been resurrected. This conviction makes necessary your view of the trinity. I, on the other hand, attempt to understand the Trinity first and then deal with the question about what would have happened had Christ sinned (which is a speculative question)." *(Email, Dr. Canale to Terry Hill, 12th October 2011)*

In saying that on the matter of the 'risk' to the divine Son of God I share the views of early SDAs, Dr. Canale is correct. Certainly I would not, as he is suggesting, disagree with him. I would not though refer to these views as Arian. What Arius believed cannot be established with absolute certainty. This is because when his views were condemned at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325, his writings, upon the order of the Roman Emperor Constantine, were destroyed.

Dr. Canale is saying that I determine my non-trinitarian Godhead theology through the belief that the divine person of the Son of God could have lost his existence. This is very true. If One of the three can go out of existence, God cannot be an immortal being of three persons as depicted by the trinity doctrine. That much should be reasonably obvious.

Although Dr. Canale is aware of Ellen White's 'risk statements', he still regards it as a "speculative question". This of course is his prerogative. His conclusion though automatically says that Ellen White's views, because she said that if the incarnate divine Son of God had sinned He would not have been resurrected (just as I believe), places her with what he terms "early Adventist Arrian views". It also means that Dr. Canale realises she was not a trinitarian.

In a sermon called *The Humble One*, Jack Blanco, the author of *The Clear Word*, expressed the same type of reasoning as Dr. Canale. After referring to the angel rolling the stone away from the entrance to the tomb of Jesus he said (this sermon was at a 3ABN camp meeting)

> "What did the angel say? Son of God - your Father calls you. Oh! Even obedient in death - when He could have raised Himself. If that's not obedience I don't know what is. Stayed dead until the Father called." *(Jack Blanco, Sermon: 'The Humble One', 3ABN Fall Camp Meeting, 2010)*

How though could the person of the incarnate divine Son of God, if He was dead, have raised Himself from death? If He was dead, He would not have known anything, neither could He have done anything. He could not have been dead and alive at the same time – this is unless the belief in the immortality of the soul is accepted, which is the basis for spiritualism (the person is alive while the physical body is dead).

Blanco's words are only another way of saying that only humanity died at Calvary therefore it was only human nature that needed a resurrection – not an incarnate divine person. Again this is trinitarian theology.

Blanco, in a paper he presented at the *Adventist Theological Society* (ATS) Trinity Symposium held at Collegedale, Tennessee in 2006, spoke of the submissiveness of Christ. After saying that Christ's mission as the Lamb of God was completed at the cross, he asks "Why did He not rise from the tomb soon after burial? He continued by asking

> "Why did he remain in the tomb until Sunday morning? Well we may give numerous reasons, and there may be numerous reasons, but the fact is that He remained in the tomb submissively waiting until an angel came and rolled away the stone, even though He had power to do so. Paul reminds us that it was God who raised Christ from the dead. In other words, Christ submissively waited in the tomb until His Father called Him. Submissiveness in death. The kind of submissiveness - this kind of submissiveness, is more than human. It is divine." *(Jack Blanco, Trinity Symposium, Collegedale, Texas, 2006)*

Here again we see it claimed that Christ could have released Himself from the tomb. This is because, so it is said here by Jack Blanco, He had the power to do so. It must be reasoned therefore that if Christ could have accomplished this, then He must have possessed the ability to use this power. Power without the ability to use it is impotent. Christ, therefore, according to this reasoning (trinitarian theology), was not really dead. Jack Blanco equates Christ's death with Him ***consciously*** waiting for His Father to call Him? This is not death as explained in Scripture. It is though trinitarian theology. It is that which, as I said previously, destroys the gospel.

Remember, this latter presentation by Jack Blanco was at a trinity symposium held by our church. Those who would like to listen to what he said on the two occasions cited above, can do so at the following two links:

> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zhYemHqTdRY (quoted at 52 minutes 43 seconds)
>
> http://delongdirect.com/sermons/SERMONS/Adventist%20Theological%20Society/2006%20Trinity%20Symposium/Trinity%20in%20History%20&%20Theology/Jack%20Blanco/11.%20Trinitarian%20Model%20for%20Ministry%20-%20Blanco.mp3 (quoted at 18 minutes 35 seconds)

Max Hatton, author of the book *Understanding the Trinity*, which is a book, according to our Biblical Research Institute (BRI), that was especially written and published to combat the rising tide of non-trinitarianism within our denomination, also claims, as an orthodox trinitarian, that the divine person of the Son of God did not die at Calvary.

In 2014, in an email to a huge number of undisclosed recipients, including myself, Hatton spoke out against what I believed as a non-trinitarian. He wrote:

> "I made it clear to Terry that as long as I believe that Jesus was Yahweh and as long as I believe in the Trinity doctrine he has no hope of convincing me that the Divine Word died on the cross." *(Max Hatton, email to undisclosed recipients, copy to Terry Hill, 13th May 2014)*

In another email to me a few months earlier, Hatton had explained

> "The suffering of Jesus was felt by the Divine human Jesus right up to the point of death. His Divinity experienced the agony of it all just as much as His humanity suffered. At the point of death His humanity died but His Divinity which had suffered everything that death means to anyone could not ease [sic] to live. A Divine Person could not and did not die." *(Email, Max Hatton to Terry Hill, 27th February 2014)*

This again is trinitarianism. Two weeks later, Hatton re-emphasised his view

> "The Divinity and humanity of Jesus both suffered right from the time of the Garden of Gethsemane right through to the moment of His death on the cross. His Omnipotent Divinity tasted His death but it could not actually experience it. Only His humanity could actually die." *(Email, Max Hatton to Terry Hill 11th March 2014)*

So, as we can see, trinitarian theology denies that in the plan of redemption a risk was taken concerning the existence of the divine Son of God. It also denies that the divine person of the Son of God died at Calvary. These are two of the reasons I reject trinitarianism. It is also why we know for certain that Ellen White was not a trinitarian. She believed the divine Son of God did die at Calvary, and she believed also there was a risk to His eternal existence. We have seen this for ourselves.

A metaphorical role-playing Godhead

Trinity theology denies that a divine person died at Calvary. It also denies there was ever a risk to the existence of the divine Son of God. As I said above, these two beliefs, when I became a SDA almost 50 years ago, were very dear to me. This is why, in the year 2000 when I first realised what was involved in trinitarian theology, I stopped calling myself a trinitarian.

Three years later in the year 2003, I was stopped from preaching in the SDA Church. This happened after (a) I had objected to my local conference president, also to the editor of the press here in the UK, about a book we had published explaining the trinity doctrine (this book was called *Understanding the Trinity* – and had been written by Max Hatton whom I just mentioned above), and (b), after I had also preached what was deemed to be a non-trinitarian sermon. This happened after serving the church faithfully for 30 years, also after preaching and teaching for 28 of those years.

Those two beliefs I mentioned above though (the divine Son of God not dying at Calvary and the denial of the risk belief concerning the divine Son of God) are not the only beliefs to which I take exception that are currently taught today by our present-day trinitarians. I also object to their idea, taught in our official denominational publications, that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not really a father, or a son, or a holy spirit, but are just three otherwise unnamed divine beings who are only role-playing (play-acting) their various parts. Thus the SDA trinitarians teach that these designations of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, do not depict reality but are simply metaphors.

These trinitarians believe that sometime in the ages of eternity past, three divine beings, who are inseparably connected to each other in one divine substance as the one God (see pages 5-7 above), decided that for the sake of future created beings, one divine person should take on the role of the Father, another should take on the role of the Son of the Father, and the other should be referred to as the Holy Spirit. This is the present-day theology of the SDA Church. I could not accept this theology, and I made my views known. Hence I was stopped from preaching.

Those who would like to read my views on this idea that the terminologies of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are only metaphors can do so by going to the following links.

https://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/Articles_pdf/Metaphors_1.pdf (part one)

https://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/Articles_pdf/Metaphors_2.pdf (part two)

As I said above, my belief, which I firmly believe is in keeping with Scripture and the spirit of prophecy, is that Christ is truly the Son of God, begotten (brought forth) of God in eternity, whilst the Holy Spirit is the Father and Son omnipresent when they, the Father and the Son, are physically and bodily in Heaven.

Even though each are God, I reject any notion that the three are inseparably connected as the one God as purported by the trinity doctrine. This not only goes beyond what God has revealed in His written word, but also, in turn, destroys the gospel. It denies that God really has a son, and it denies that a divine person died at Calvary. This to me is unacceptable theology. This is regardless of who, or how many, teach it in our denomination. We are told in Scripture

> "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16

If God did not really have a son to send, and if a divine person did not die at Calvary, then this verse of scripture has led countless thousands of Christians to believe a lie.

Here is a question for the trinitarians who may read this article. If God does not really have a son, and if the divine person who is role-playing the part of a son did not die at Calvary, and if there never was any risk concerning His eternal existence, then what, according to trinity theology, is the gospel? Please feel free to email me and let me know. I would appreciate it. Thank you.

Summary

I set out in this article to show that just because someone refers to the Holy Spirit as a person, as did Ellen White, this does not automatically mean that they accept trinitarian theology. I also set out to show that because someone uses the term 'trinity', this does not mean they believe the trinity doctrine (trinity orthodoxy). I also set out to show that SDA trinity theology is the same as Roman Catholic orthodoxy trinity theology. I believe I have successfully achieved all my objectives,

From what we have seen, trinity orthodoxy was not acceptable to early SDAs. It prohibited their beliefs concerning God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. This is why these SDAs rejected trinitarianism. They believed it to be unscriptural. This is why all those people I list on the opening page of my website, namely Joseph Bates, James White, Joseph Waggoner, Merritt Cornell, John Nevins Andrew, John Loughborough, Uriah Smith, S. N. Haskell, Alonzo Jones, Ellet Waggoner, and even Ellen White herself, never made any profession of trinitarian theology. They were not trinitarians.

I hope that what I have written here has been of help to you the reader. God bless you as you mediate on the great themes of the Bible.

Terry Hill

4th November 2023

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