

# **The Begotten Series**

**By Terry Hill**

**Written to the glory of God the Father and His Son**

**“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**

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# **The Begotten Series**

## **Section one**

### **A begotten problem**

Within Seventh-day Adventism today (2008) there still exists a major controversy concerning the trinity doctrine. This is why this *Begotten Series* has been compiled. It is to help those who are interested - which in the main will probably be Seventh-day Adventists - to understand one of its major issues.

This issue is whether or not Christ, in His pre-existence, is the Son of God, which is the same as asking whether or not He is begotten (caused to be or sourced) of God. These two questions are synonymous. If it is believed that Christ is begotten (caused to be or sourced) of the Father, it is also believed that He is truly the Son of God. If it is believed that Christ is not begotten (not caused to be or sourced) of the Father, then the belief must be that He is not truly the Son of God. When all is said and done, this is the issue at stake.

This first section is not in any way meant to resolve this issue. It is to introduce its reader to the problem. It is also to highlight the reason as to why this problem exists today within the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

### **A changeover in beliefs**

Most who have become involved in this trinity debate will realise that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has not always been a trinitarian denomination. They will also know that it was not until after the death of Ellen White that moves were officially and openly made to bring trinitarianism into Seventh-day Adventism. This is only another way of saying that throughout the time period of Ellen White's ministry (1844-1915), the denominational faith of Seventh-day Adventists was strictly non-trinitarian.

Even for decades following Ellen White's death, this same non-trinitarian faith was still recognised as being the common faith (common belief) of Seventh-day Adventists. This is covered in detail in the series '*A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism*'.

### [A Detailed History of the Trinity Doctrine](#)

As a matter of passing interest, Seventh-day Adventists believe that Ellen White was gifted with the spirit of prophecy therefore because of this they recognise her as being God's messenger to His remnant people. If you would like to read a paper (comprising three sections) regarding her role within Seventh-day Adventism, [click here](#)

## Ellen White's writings in relation to Scripture

### **The begotten gripe**

The major gripe that some had (and still have) with the original faith of Seventh-day Adventism is the begotten concept of Christ. This is the belief that at some point in eternity, too far back for the human mind to even comprehend, the Son proceeded forth of (came out of) the Father. To put this in another way, the standard faith of Seventh-day Adventists, whilst Ellen White was alive, was that Christ is begotten (sourced or caused to be) of the Father. In its historical sense, an explanation of this faith can be found in later sections.

Very soon after the death of Ellen White, this begotten (non-trinitarian) faith came under serious attack from within our denomination. So too did our faith concerning the Holy Spirit. New beliefs were filtered in. After decades of promoting these new beliefs, a version of the trinity doctrine was accepted. This happened at the 1980 General Conference session held at Dallas Texas. This was the first time a trinity doctrine had been voted into the fundamental beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists.

Whilst these opening remarks have put this particular part of our denominational history into an extremely small nutshell, it is the truth as to what has happened. In other words, after Ellen White died, our denominational faith (beliefs) underwent a dramatic change. It behoves us therefore, as today's Seventh-day Adventists, also as God's remnant people, to discover why this changeover took place. It is also our responsibility to determine whether or not this was a valid change.

The begotten concept of Christ, as held originally within Seventh-day Adventism, was also the faith of early Christianity. It continued this way, within Christianity, throughout the centuries that followed. History attests that during the time of the first two ecumenical Councils of Nicaea (AD 325) and Constantinople (AD 381), this same begotten faith was the predominant faith of Christianity. It was these same councils that led to the formation of the trinity doctrine. Please note that in this study from hereon, also in contrast to all other versions, this original version of the trinity doctrine will be known as orthodox or orthodoxy. This is not the version held today by Seventh-day Adventists. Theirs is slightly different. We shall come back to this point later although it still constitutes a trinity doctrine.

In the formation of the original (orthodox) trinity doctrine, the begotten concept of Christ was an integral part of its structure. In the next two sections with regards to God and Christ, we shall be reviewing the beliefs of very early Christians. We shall do this by taking a look at the writings of some of the early church fathers. Following this we shall then be taking a look at this begotten concept of Christ from the viewpoint of the Scriptures. This is the place from where these very early Christians would have formulated their beliefs. We shall also be looking at the begotten concept of Christ as in the history of Seventh-day Adventism. We shall compare it with current Seventh-day Adventist theology. This should give

us an overall view of this begotten dispute, also a very balanced one.

## **A Scriptural and historical problem**

There are two very important reasons as to why this begotten debate exists today within Seventh-day Adventism. One is from a Scriptural point of view (theology) whilst the other is from an historical standpoint (Christian/Seventh-day Adventist history). This will become much clearer as you read on. As we proceed through this series, we will consider both of these aspects in detail.

First we shall take a very brief look at the Scriptural perspective part of the problem. Then we shall briefly note the historical aspect. This will set the scene for the sections that follow.

### **The problem from a Scriptural perspective**

If we are talking in terms of the identification of Christ, meaning who He actually is, this discussion concerns the way that the New Testament writers describe Him. Allow me to explain. When opening his gospel, John penned the words that most Christians can probably recite with ease.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. John 1:1-2

John clearly says that the Word (whom he later describes in verse 14 as becoming flesh) is God but he also adds “the Word was “with God”. This then is **the** problem.

In much the same way as John described Christ, so too did Paul the apostle (this was almost 40 years prior to John writing his gospel). He also said that the pre-existent Christ **was** God and was **with** God. Whilst everything that the apostle wrote in this respect cannot be quoted here, the following will suffice as a summary

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”  
Philippians 2:5-8

Just a cursory look at this Scripture tells us that Christ, in His pre-existence, was “in the form of God”. It also tells us that He was “equal with God”. Here again is the very same problem. It is how Christians can profess two divine personalities to be God.

Christ being God manifest in the flesh is indeed the mysteries of mysteries. It is also the faith of Christianity. This though does not mean that this is something that cannot be reasonably understood. I say this because through a prayerful

study of the Scriptures, it must be said that each sincere seeker of truth can come to an understanding of this one aspect of the Christian faith that sets it aside from all the other religions of the world. This is that in the person of His beloved Son, our God became flesh and gave His life as atonement for sin for every person that has ever lived. This is the ongoing message of Christianity.

### **Not the Father but the Son**

That God became flesh, dwelt amongst us and died, and was resurrected for our eternal redemption, is indeed the message of Christianity but never must it be thought that it was the personage of God the Father that came to earth. It was the Word of God (the Son of God) who became incarnate. This was God in the person of His Son. As we noted above, John the gospel writer wrote at the beginning of what is termed the prologue to his gospel (John 1:1-18)

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” John 1:1

He later went on to say

“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” John 1:14

The majority of Christians would agree that the personality referred to here in John 1:1 as the “**God**” whom the Word was with - is God the Father. In other words, most Christians would accept that it was not God the Father that became flesh but “**the Word**”. This shows us that “**the Word**” and the “**God**” (whom the Word was with) are two separate personalities. Yet as we have already noted, the mystery (and the problem) is that they are both designated God.

An additional aspect to this mystery (also an addition to the problem) is the Holy Spirit. This is because many Christians regard this divine personality as God. This is why most will confess that the Scriptures reveal three personalities of the Godhead. This of course is the belief that initially led to the formulation of the trinity doctrine. Whilst an explanation of the trinity doctrine is not the prime purpose of this Begotten Series, the intent is to show how Christ can truly be termed God and yet at the same time be truly the Son of God. It will be shown that because Christ is begotten of God then He must be God Himself begotten. This is because only God can proceed of God. Note that it is being said here that the Son is God Himself begotten, not a begotten god. The difference is crucial.

From the above we have touched on the problem from a Scriptural perspective. From section four through to section nine we shall deal with this as a theology. We shall also encounter in the process Seventh-day Adventist history.

### **An historical perspective**

Earlier in this section, it was said that there are **two reasons** why today, within

the Seventh-day Adventist Church, that this begotten problem exists. Here is the second reason. It is from the historical perspective.

The historical Christian explanation as to how Christ can be regarded as God, yet also be *with* God, is that in His pre-existence He is begotten of God. This means that He is sourced or caused to be of God therefore He is truly the Son of God. Whilst Ellen White was alive, this was the theology professed by Seventh-day Adventists but Seventh-day Adventism today rejects this reasoning. This is very clearly seen in their recent denominational literature. We shall see this in section ten.

Within current Seventh-day Adventist theology, the concept that the pre-existent Christ is begotten (sourced or caused to be) of the Father is firmly rejected. This means that it is not accepted that Christ is truly the Son of God, at least not in His pre-existence. This is the begotten problem as seen in its historical sense, meaning that current Seventh-day Adventist theology is out of harmony with early Christianity and with early Seventh-day Adventism. This is the main reason why this trinity debate exists today within our denomination. It is all a question of whether the early Christians, also early Seventh-day Adventists, were correct in their understanding of Scripture or is the Seventh-day Adventist Church today correct. One thing we can be sure of is that they all cannot be correct. This is because a begotten concept of Christ is diametrically opposed to an unbegotten concept. For this reason we need to study this subject for ourselves. We must then decide what to believe on the weight of evidence that we find.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church today says that there is nothing in Scripture to even suggest that Christ is begotten (sourced) of God the Father. We shall briefly encounter this claim later in this section. In section ten we shall take a look at it in more detail.

### **A nutshell explanation of the historical begotten problem**

As a brief explanation of what the begotten problem is from a perspective of history we shall now quote from a number of different sources. These sources reveal the faith of early Christianity, also the faith of early Seventh-day Adventism.

The first of these sources is a letter written by the second century martyr Ignatius. This was written more than 200 years prior to the beginning of the 4th century Arian controversy. The second source is a letter written by the Bishop of Alexandria. This was at the height of the 4th century Arian controversy. The third source is a profession of early Christian faith presented at the Council of Nicaea (AD 325). This was in an attempt to resolve this Arian controversy. Overall, this will reveal the early Christian faith.

The fourth historical source is the writings of E. J. Waggoner. He was one of the main speakers at the famous 1888 Minneapolis Seventh-day Adventist General Conference session. The fifth historical source is the spirit of prophecy writings,

meaning the writings of Ellen White. These latter two sources reveal the faith of early Seventh-day Adventists.

The sixth source is the Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology (2000). This will reveal the current official belief of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. As will be seen later, this latter belief is in total contrast to the other views that are presented (early Christianity and early Seventh-day Adventism). By comparing these differing views, we will see why this begotten problem exists today within Seventh-day Adventism.

### **The begotten faith of early Christianity (Ignatius)**

We shall now look at the first source of our Christian history perspective. This is a letter written by Ignatius of Antioch. It is generally believed that Ignatius was born around AD 35 (some say a little later). This was shortly after the death and resurrection of Jesus. He lived therefore during the time of the time of the apostles. Ignatius died as a martyr for his faith. Whilst the exact date is unknown, most commentators agree that it was between AD 98 and AD 110 (an oft cited date is AD 107).

It was at the Coliseum in Rome that Ignatius met his death. He was torn apart by wild beasts. Amongst other reasons for this barbaric act, the Roman authorities probably hoped that this would help deter the continuing rise of the Christian faith. On the way to his death, Ignatius wrote a number of letters to the believers in different churches. These letters, to a great extent, concerned heresies that he believed some were attempting to bring into the Christian faith. To the believers in Trallies (now Aydin) in Turkey he termed those who taught such things as “Christ betrayers” (we shall see more of what he wrote in the next section).

There are a number of disputes regarding the validity of what Ignatius wrote in these letters but what he is quoted here as saying was in complete harmony with the views of other early Christian writers. In the next two sections we shall see this very clearly. In other words, what we see written by Ignatius was the standard belief in early Christianity. With regards to Christ therefore, the Christian church upheld the views of Ignatius. Never did the church say that his views were heretical. If his beliefs had been considered heretical, then the other early Christian writers would have spoken out against him.

To put this in another way again, it would be unreasonable to say that the church regarded Ignatius as heretical. This is because no literature can be found disagreeing with him (at least I have never found any). If regarding his beliefs the church had thought him wrong, then we can be sure that by now we would have found documentation to that effect. It must be accepted therefore that at that time Ignatius wrote his letters (early 2nd century), his beliefs were the norm in Christianity.

Ignatius penned these words to the Trallians (this was with respect to those he termed Christ betrayers)



“For they alienate Christ from the Father, and the law from Christ. They also calumniate His being born of the Virgin; they are ashamed of His cross; they deny His passion; and they do not believe His resurrection. They introduce God as a Being unknown; they suppose Christ to be unbegotten; and as to the Spirit, they do not admit that He exists. Some of them say that the Son is a mere man, and that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are but the same person, and that the creation is the work of God, not by Christ, but by some other strange power.” (*Ignatius, The Epistle of Ignatius to the Trallians, Chap. VI*)

Ignatius saying is saying here that all sorts of wrong beliefs concerning the personalities of the Godhead were being taught amongst Christians. One of these false beliefs, so Ignatius says, was that Christ was **not begotten**. This gives us a very strong indication that at this time (the beginning of the 2nd century AD), this begotten faith was the generally held belief of Christianity. Note Ignatius said that these heretics “alienate Christ from the Father”, also, very interesting (especially as far as Seventh-day Adventists are concerned) that they alienate “the law from Christ”.

It is very interesting to note that Ignatius is said to have been a convert of John the gospel writer. This being the case, he would have known John’s theology first hand. Both Ignatius and John died around the end of the first century or early part of the second century of Christianity. We can see therefore that even in the very opening decades of the Christian era, this begotten faith was held by Christians. So where did Ignatius and early Christians obtain this faith? The answer must be that they obtained it from the Scriptures. Where else would they have gotten it? As it says in the online Wikipedia Encyclopaedia

“Saint Ignatius of Antioch (also known as Theophorus) (ca. 35-107 ) was the third Bishop or Patriarch of Antioch and a student of the Apostle John. En route to his martyrdom in Rome, Ignatius wrote a series of letters which have been preserved as an example of the theology of the earliest Christians.” (*Wikipedia Encyclopaedia, Ignatius of Antioch*)

### **The begotten faith of early Christianity (the Bishop of Alexandria)**

We shall now take a look at our second source of historical Christianity.

At the height of the 4th century Arian controversy, the Bishop of Alexandria wrote a letter to the Bishop of Constantinople. It was written to deny what he said were the beliefs of the heretics. It was also as an explanation of his and his follower’s beliefs. Throughout his letter, Alexander maintains that the Scriptures say, also that the apostolic Church had always taught, that the Father alone is unbegotten and that the Son is begotten of the Father. This confirms that what Ignatius wrote regarding a begotten Christ was not a heretical viewpoint but was the standard faith of early Christianity. Whilst there is far too much in Alexander’s letter to be quoted here (we shall see more of it later), in summary he wrote

“We have learnt that the Son is immutable and unchangeable, all-sufficient and perfect, like the Father, lacking only His “unbegotten.” He is the exact and precisely similar image of His Father. For it is clear that the image fully contains everything by which the greater likeness exists, as the Lord taught us when He said, ‘My Father is greater than I.’” (*The ecclesiastical history of Theodoret, Book 1, Chapter 3, page 39 ‘The Epistle of Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria to Alexander, Bishop of Constantinople’*)

According to Alexander, the only difference between the Father and Son is that the Son is **not unbegotten** meaning that the Son **is begotten of the Father**. Apart from this, according to Alexander’s reasoning, both of these divine personalities are exactly the same. Notice too that this bishop says that the Father is “the greater likeness”. In other words, the Son has His source in the Father therefore in this sense only the Father is the greatest, or to put it another way again, apart from one divine person being unbegotten and the other divine person begotten of the unbegotten, there is no difference between them. This indeed was the faith of early Christianity. This was that the Son of God was the express image (the exact likeness) of the Father. We shall see more of this as we go along.

When Alexander wrote this letter (early 4th century), the Arian controversy was raging. This was a dispute regarding whether the Son was eternally (everlastingly) begotten of the Father or was He begotten at a point in eternity. It also revolved around whether the Son was of (meaning belonging to) the same substance of the Father or was He of like or similar substance. It was this dispute that led to the first ecumenical council of Nicaea being convened in AD 325. The important thing to remember, particularly for the purposes of our study, is that both sides in this dispute believed that the Son is begotten of God. In this 4th century debate therefore, the begotten concept was not an issue (not a problem). It was the common belief held within Christianity. This same bishop then said (this was in defence of the belief that the Son was **eternally** begotten and not begotten at a point in eternity)

“And in accordance with this we believe that the Son always existed of the Father; for he is the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His Father’s Person.” (*Ibid*)

Alexander was quoting from Hebrews 1:3. He is saying that the Son is not unbegotten but was begotten in “the express image of His Father’s person”. This word “person” (Gr. hypostasis) is extremely important. It means the undergirding – what makes something what it is. We shall return our thoughts to this in section five. This will be the second part of our theological study. This bishop then said

“But let no one be led by the word ‘always’ to imagine that the Son is unbegotten, as is thought by some who have their intellects blinded: for to say that He was, that He has always been, and that before all ages, is not to say

that He is unbegotten.” (*Ibid*)

Alexander is simply saying that because Christ is said to have eternally existed (this is the belief maintained in any version of the trinity doctrine), it does not mean that He is unbegotten (not sourced of the Father). In fact the bishop said that those who maintain that Christ is unbegotten (meaning not begotten/not sourced of the Father) “have their intellects blinded”. So it was that when the original (orthodox) trinitarian doctrine was formulated, it said that the Son is everlastingly begotten of the Father. This was the concept that was depicted in the eventually accepted creed of Nicaea (AD 325). This creed later formed the basis of the original/orthodox trinity doctrine.

Important to recognise here is that like most church leaders at that time, Alexander’s language would have been Greek (Koine the common Greek tongue) therefore to understand the New Testament Scriptures (which most likely would have been originally written in the common Greek although some believe Matthew’s gospel was originally written in Hebrew) neither he nor his fellow leaders, or those in opposition to him (the Arians), needed to translate them from one language to another. In other words, these Greek speaking church leaders (bishops/parish priests etc) well understood the language of the New Testament Scriptures. Greek was the common language at that time. We shall elaborate on this in the next section. Interesting to note here is that in another translation of this letter (as a different rendering to “having their intellects blinded”), Alexander says that those who believe that the Son is unbegotten are “deficient in intellectual power” (as quoted in A. T. Jones The Two Republics Page 333). From this we can see very clearly that Alexander had little regard for those who said that the Son was not begotten.

As has been said previously, it was this begotten concept of Christ that made Him not only a true Son but also truly God. Without this concept, some might say that He was being depicted as another god.

### **The begotten faith of early Christianity (Council of Nicaea)**

Our third historical source also reveals the faith of early Christianity.

As we have already noted, the very first Christian ecumenical Council was held at Nicaea in AD 325. The Roman Emperor Constantine convened this council. It was an attempt by him to resolve a continuing dispute within the church regarding Christ (the oft called Arian controversy). This began when a parish priest by the name of Arius objected to what his bishop was teaching. This bishop was the one from whose letter we have just quoted from above (Alexander of Alexandria). This is why Alexander wrote it. It was to confirm and expound his beliefs in opposition to the Arians.

During the early part of the 4th century, this Christ dispute was causing a major rift within the Christian church. This is why Constantine, newly espoused to the Christian faith, attempted to resolve it. It appears to some that this emperor regarded Christianity as a means of welding together his ailing empire, meaning

that he would have regarded this dispute as an issue that was obstructing him from achieving his purposes. After failing by various means to bring an end to this dispute (such as writing letters to Alexander and Arius) he resorted to convening this council.

At the Council of Nicaea there were three major parties involved. There were those whom today we normally term the Arians (now known as the non or anti-trinitarians) and there were those who belonged to Alexander's group (these were the up and coming trinitarians). There were also those who were middle-of-the-road meaning that this group did not particularly side with either of the two other parties.

This middle-of-the-road group was by far the largest of the three parties. In other words, the majority of the bishops at this council were not committed to the extremes of either of the two opposing factions (the Arians or the Alexandrians). This shows us that up to this time, this Christ problem had not existed as such. The bishop of Alexander had brought this about when he attempted to expound what we now know as trinitarian concepts of Christ. This in turn led to the objections from Arius. So began the dispute.

During this council, Eusebius the Bishop of Caesarea (as the spokesman for the middle-of-the-road group) attempted to settle it by submitting a confession of faith that according to some sources was an old Palestinian confession. It seems it had been used in instructing converts to Christianity and had doubled as a baptismal confession. Eusebius had hoped that it would suit everyone present at the council, thereby restoring harmony again. This confession of faith was in fact middle-of-the-road and non-controversial. The reason why I say this is because the vast majority present at this council (if not all) would have believed it. The problem was that whilst this confession suited the Arians and also the middle-of-the-road group, meaning it suited the vast majority at this council, it did not suit the up and coming trinitarians. This is because whilst they would have believed what it said, it also allowed for the beliefs of the Arians. In other words, this confession that Eusebius presented was theologically correct but was far too elastic - too all embracing.

Whilst we will not go into any more details here, suffice to say that this confession was rejected whilst another was submitted (and eventually accepted) that condemned the Arians. The latter formed the basis of the orthodox trinity doctrine that came later.

As far as our studies here are concerned, it is very interesting to examine the confession of faith that Eusebius presented at the council. We can read this today because in explanation of what had happened at Nicaea, He later included it in a letter to his parishioners. He wrote to them saying

*“As we have received from the Bishops who preceded us, and in our first catechizings, and when we received baptism, and as we have learned from*

the divine Scriptures, and as we constantly believed and taught as presbyter and bishop, so believing also at the time present, we report to you our faith, and it is this:" (*Eusebius, letter to his church, as quoted in J. Stevenson's 'A New Eusebius' revised by W. H. C. Frend*)

Eusebius informed his parishioners that the confession of faith that he personally had presented at Nicaea was the very same faith as that which he had been teaching them. He also said that it was what the other bishops before him had been teaching. This therefore had been the consistent faith of what we term today early Christianity.

Notice that Eusebius said it was the faith that they as Christian leaders had "learned from the divine Scriptures" and had "constantly believed and taught". This faith therefore was the norm. In other words, what Eusebius said he had presented at Nicaea (the old Palestinian confession) was, at that time, the common faith of Christianity. It was not something new. It should go without saying therefore that what Alexander and his group were pushing for (the up and coming trinitarians) was something new. Certainly it was something not generally believed then by Christians. It was therefore to Christianity, a *new theology*.

Eusebius continued in his letter to his parishioners (this is the confession of faith he presented at the council)

"We believe in One God, Father Almighty, the Maker of all things visible and invisible. And in One lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God, God from God, Light from Light, Life from Life, Only - begotten Son, first-born of all creation,' before all the ages begotten from the Father, by whom also all things were made; who for our salvation was incarnate, and lived among men, and suffered, and rose again the third day, and ascended to the Father, and will come again in glory to judge living and dead. And we believe also in One Holy Spirit." (*Ibid*)

This very early confession of Christian faith says that the Son is "begotten from the Father" "before all ages" (some translations say before all time or before all worlds). This begotten faith therefore was the common continuing faith of very early Christianity. As has been said before, everyone at this council would have agreed with it.

Whilst Ellen White was alive, this very same faith was also the faith of Seventh-day Adventists. This was also the faith, because it said Christ is begotten of God, which says He is truly the Son of God and is therefore God Himself. This was in keeping with early Christianity.

As has been said previously, the creed that was eventually submitted and accepted at Nicaea (this is the creed that later became the basis of the orthodox trinity faith) said that Christ was *eternally* or *everlastingly* begotten of the Father. This was one part of the creed with which the original Arians, also the old time pioneers of Seventh-day Adventists, did not agree. This was that the Son, as a

separate personality from God the Father, had *always* been begotten. They believed instead that as a separate personality from the Father (meaning as a Son) He was begotten in eternity, too far back for the human mind to even imagine it. This was like saying that He had existed from the days of eternity.

### **The begotten faith of early Seventh-day Adventists**

The fourth source for the summary of our historical perspective is the once-held begotten faith of Seventh-day Adventists. This is where we shall quote from E. J. Waggoner, one of the main speakers at the 1888 Minneapolis General Conference session. His much-read book *Christ and His Righteousness (1890)* is said to depict his message. It certainly depicts the then Godhead theology of Seventh-day Adventists. We shall quote from this book now. On page 9 when asking the question of how we should consider Christ we find these words

“The Word was “in the beginning”. The mind of man cannot grasp the ages that are spanned in this phrase.” (*E. J. Waggoner, ‘Christ and His Righteousness’, page 9, ‘How shall we consider Christ?’ 1890*)

This was in keeping with the confession of faith that Eusebius of Caesarea had submitted at Nicaea (see above). In 1888, this appears to have been the common faith of Seventh-day Adventists (see sections 20 to 23 of the detailed history series).

#### [A Detailed History of the Trinity Doctrine](#)

Waggoner then said with respect to when and how the Son of God was begotten of His Father

“It is not given to men to know when or how the Son was begotten; but we know that He was the Divine Word, not simply before He came to this earth to die, but even before the world was created.” (*Ibid*)

As we shall see more clearly in following sections, Waggoner’s reasoning as to *how* the Son was begotten was also in keeping with early Christianity. In other words, no confession was made as to understanding the mechanics of it. Waggoner added

“We know that Christ “proceeded forth and come from God” (John 8:42) but it was so far back in the ages of eternity as to be far beyond the grasp of the mind of man.” (*Ibid*)

On page 21 of this same book, Waggoner confirms what he had said previously

“There was a time when Christ proceeded forth and came from God, from the bosom of the Father (John 8:42 and 1:18) but that time was so far back in the days of eternity that to finite comprehension it is practically without beginning. But the point is that Christ is a begotten Son and not a created subject.” (*Ibid*,

*pages 21-22, 'Is Christ a created being?')*

Whilst Ellen White was alive, this was the generally accepted faith of Seventh-day Adventists. It was also part and parcel of the message of Minneapolis that Ellen White endorsed. Some may say that Ellen White did not agree with everything that Waggoner said at Minneapolis (which is very true) therefore she may not have agreed with his begotten Christ concept. We shall see now, from her writings, that this reasoning is totally unfounded. This will constitute our fifth historical source.

### **The begotten faith of early Seventh-day Adventists (spirit of prophecy)**

In the *Signs of the Times*, also in writing as to why Christ is truly the divine Son of God, Ellen White wrote in 1895 (note this was 7 years after the Minneapolis General Conference, also near the completion of compiling *The Desire of Ages*)

*"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, 'Christ our complete salvation')*

In the Scriptures, there are many who are termed sons of God. These are angels who have been created by God (Job 38:6-7) and Christians who have been adopted by God (John 1:12). Here Ellen White contrasts them with Christ by saying that He was **begotten of God**. Christ therefore is the unique one, the only one caused to be (begotten) of God.

It is because He is the one and only begotten of God that makes Christ unique amongst all these other sons of God. In other words, the other sons are not said to be begotten of God but either created or adopted by Him. In contrast, Christ is the only begotten (Son) of God, or the only one of His kind. We shall see more of this in the theological sections. This is when again we shall be looking at this statement of Ellen White.

Another aspect of this statement is that a created or an adopted Christ were two heretical beliefs that were attempted to be brought into the early Christian faith. By saying that Christ is begotten, Ellen White was refuting both of these heresies. She is saying that Christ is the Son of God *because* He is begotten. Note the second time she used the word *begotten*, she was not using it as she did the first time – meaning as a descriptive word (an adjective). This time she is using it as a verb (a happening word). In other words she is saying that because Christ is begotten (of the Father) He is *the* Son of God. Here there are three actions (acts of God). One is creation. One is adoption. One is begetting.

Note also that she says more specifically that Christ was a Son *"begotten in the*

express image of the Father's person" (see Hebrews 1:3). This was exactly the same reasoning as the 4th century bishop of Alexandria (see his letter above). Ellen White made this statement after receiving 50 years of revelation from God. At that time it was also in harmony with the generally held belief of Seventh-day Adventists. If it is doubted that Ellen White meant that Christ is literally begotten (sourced) of God, then all that needs to be done is to take a quick look at what she wrote only six weeks later. This time it was in the *Review and Herald* – the official organ of the Seventh-day Adventist church. At this time she was still in Australia.

"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'*)

Here we can see that instead of using the word begotten (as the second time), Ellen White uses the word "made". As in the previous statement, she first uses "begotten" as an adjective (a describing word) and then "made" as a verb (a happening word). It is apparent therefore that in her thinking this "made" concept is the same as the "begotten" in her previous statement. In the mind of Ellen White, begotten" (made) was a happening in ages past. Again remember that this was after receiving revelations from God for over 50 years. Notice too she said that this making (producing), just as she said of being begotten, was in the "express image" of God's "person".

As here expressed through the spirit of prophecy, this begotten faith was the faith of early Seventh-day Adventists. This remained the same for decades after the death of Ellen White. This is the same faith that openly, shortly after God's messenger passed from the scene, came under attack from within our own denomination. This eventually led us, as a denomination, to accepting the trinity doctrine. This of course was not as the original (orthodox) trinity doctrine, which as we have already noted was totally based on the Son being the begotten of God (see above) but that all three personalities are *all unbegotten*. This unbegotten view of Christ is the same view that the Bishop of Alexander did not regard with very much esteem. He said that this was something that only those who "have their intellects blinded" believed (see above).

In 1893, Ellen White spoke of an incident that our church experienced in New Zealand. This was when they attempted to hire a hall to hold some meetings. They were denied this privilege. This is because the person who was responsible for letting the hall said that Seventh-day Adventists did not believe in the divinity of Christ. She reported

"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. But the answer was given that they did not want that the doctrines of Seventh-day Adventists should be promulgated in that community. So the door was closed.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 5th December 1893, ‘An appeal for the Australasian field’*)

To Seventh-day Adventists living at that time, this was confirmation that what they were teaching about Christ’s pre-existence was correct. How else could this statement possibly be understood? Anyone reading it would reason the same way.

We now need to move on to our sixth source in summary of our historical perspective and see what Seventh-day Adventists today (2008) are officially said to believe. This will show us where the real problem is today.

### **Official current Seventh-day Adventism**

In the official Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist theology (this is the official exposition of what Seventh-day Adventists are said to believe), Fernando Canale, in summary of what he has previously said, puts it this way

“There is, therefore, no ground within the biblical understanding of the Godhead for the idea of a generation of the Son from the Father.” (*Fernando Canale, Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia, Volume 12, page 125, ‘The doctrine of God’*)

He also says on the same page

“In the Bible, therefore, no ground is found for the idea that there is an ontological subordination of the Son to the Father or that the divine reality of the Father has in any way a primacy of origin over the divine reality of the Son”. (*Ibid*)

Regarding whether Christ is truly the pre-existent Son of God or not, this really does sum up the current official position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It says that He is not begotten (sourced) of the Father therefore He is not truly a son. This of course is in direct opposition to the faith of early Christianity. It is also in opposition to that which was believed by early Seventh-day Adventists. This was even up to the time that Ellen White died. We have also seen that it is also contrary to what we have been told through the spirit of prophecy. In contrast to this past begotten faith, current Seventh-day Adventist theology says that Christ is one of three unbegotten divine beings in one triune (trinity) structure that is called God. For confirmation of this, see fundamental belief No. 2 of their 28 fundamental beliefs. Note this trinity belief is separate from belief No’s. 3, 4 and 5 which respectively refer to the individual personalities of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Officially, Seventh-day Adventists today deny any type of Sonship within the Godhead. This is because they deny the begotten faith.

As well as from a Scriptural perspective, we can now see the begotten debate from an historical standpoint. It is simply that Seventh-day Adventism today is completely out of harmony with both early Christianity and early Seventh-day Adventism. This is one of the main reasons why, within our denomination today, we have a trinity debate.

It must be said that this does not automatically make current Seventh-day Adventist theology wrong. It may have been that concerning Christ, early Christianity, also early Seventh-day Adventists, also Ellen White, had it wrong. This is something that every individual needs to decide for him or her self. It must be determined by the weight of evidence available. This Begotten Series therefore is to help people (primarily I would think Seventh-day Adventists) to better understand this issue.

### **A parallel**

In all of this there is a parallel. This is that concerning the person of Christ, early Christianity began with a very simple faith, after which it developed a more complex philosophical faith. This latter faith said that Christ was eternally (everlastingly) begotten of God. It then went further by saying that the Holy Spirit was a personality worthy of worship. This eventually developed a trinity doctrine (the one we term orthodoxy). Much of this faith was philosophical speculation.

Exactly the same has happened within Seventh-day Adventism. Our faith concerning Christ began as a simple begotten belief. It later developed into Christ being coeternal with the Father and then, after making the Holy Spirit appear to be a person like God and Christ, which was not believed during the time of Ellen White's ministry, it eventually evolved into full blown trinitarianism.

What is interesting is that the original (orthodox) trinity doctrine became (and still is) the core belief of the vast majority of apostate Christianity (especially the Papacy) whilst the non-orthodox trinity doctrine, as espoused by certain protestant denominations, has now become the core belief of Seventh-day Adventism. This trinity history is elaborated on more fully in the paper *A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism*. You will find this study here

[A Detailed History of the Trinity Doctrine](#)

### **The next section**

If anyone reading this paper has already been involved with these Seventh-day Adventist trinity discussions, they will, to a very great extent, appreciate that the begotten debate revolves around the Greek word *monogenes*. This is why, before we move on to take a look at this word from a Scriptural perspective, we shall be taking a look at what the early Christians believed concerning Christ. This is because the Greek speaking Christians would have well understood the meaning of their own language. They would also have acquired their beliefs through a study of the Scriptures. We shall be looking at this in the next two

sections.

My prayer is that overall, this Begotten Series may be a blessing to you, also that it will help you in your understanding of the love of God that has been revealed through His Son.

God bless you as you read and study.

# The Begotten Series

## Section two

### The witness of early Christianity (Part 1 of 2)

Much of the begotten debate in Christianity today, including within Seventh-day Adventism, revolves around the meaning of the Greek word *monogenes*. This is a word that each time it is used in the KJV New Testament with reference to Christ it is translated only begotten. Other versions translate it as only Son without having the word begotten. Interesting to note is that New KJV retains the original reading.

Whichever version it is, it is always said that Jesus is the **only** Son of God. This must put Him into a classification of His own, thus differentiating Him from others in the Scriptures who are called sons of God. This is covered in more detail in later sections. We shall also be looking at how the appellation of the Son of God was used with respect to Christ by those who encountered Him.

In section four we shall also note that every time the word *monogenes* is used within the Scriptures, whether it is with regards to Christ or anyone else, it is always with respect to a child/parent relationship. Never in the Bible is it used in any other respect. Today there is much dispute as to what the Bible writers meant by their use of this word, particularly John's use of it. He is the only Bible writer that used it with respect to Christ.

The begotten concept of Christ has always been the historical belief of the Christian church but the view of many theologians today, including some within Seventh-day Adventism, is that it means one and only or unique without the actual begetting concept. This latter theology is meant to deny that Christ is a real son although having said that, it must be said that if Christ is the only one who is literally begotten (sourced) of the Father then He would be the only one of His type or kind (unique). We shall give this more consideration in section four. This is when we shall begin to study this begotten problem from the standpoint of the Scriptures.

In my own personal studies, I have found that on both sides of the *monogenes* argument there is much said that is very beneficial. I have learnt a lot from listening to both sides. This is usually the case when one is willing to listen to both sides of any debate. Interesting to note is that the Complete Jewish Bible

puts John 3:16 this way

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only and unique Son, so that everyone who trusts in him may have eternal life, instead of being utterly destroyed." John 3:16 Complete Jewish Bible

It is also interesting that in the Seventh-day Adventist publication *The Trinity*, Woodrow Whidden says

"First of all, the expression "only begotten" is a translation of the Greek word *monogenes*. The word is a combination of two Greek words: *monos* meaning "only" or "alone," and *genos*, "kind," or in the more extended sense, "sort," "family," "race," or "nation" (the English word "gene" derives from this Greek word)." (Woodrow Whidden, *The Trinity* chapter *Biblical Objections to the Trinity* page 95)

Whilst I would agree with Whidden regarding *monos*, Strong's concordance says that the second part of this word is *ginomai*, meaning, *to cause to be* or *to become* (the root of this word is an ongoing dispute amongst theologians). Again according to Strong's, this is a form of primary verb (an action word) that is used over 260 times in the New Testament. This is where it is often translated "made", "become", "come" (as in come to pass), and "became" etc. This is something else that in the fourth section we shall be considering.

There is a lot of conjecture today over this second part of this word. Some emphasise the unique aspect of it whilst some stress the *come to be* characteristic. As has been said above, amongst theologians this is constantly debated.

The conclusion as to what it was that John originally meant by his use of this word can only be decided upon by the weight of evidence that is found. This involves personal study. We shall come back to these thoughts in section three and section four. I would ask you now to take note of Whidden's next sentence. He says

"To put it as succinctly as possible, the word [*monogenes*] signifies "unique" or "one of a kind" . (*Ibid*)

Whidden is not saying here that *monogenes* actually means "unique" or "one of a kind" but that it "signifies" (suggests or indicates) it. Needless to say, if someone is the only one who is caused to be (if that was John's intent of *monogenes* as says Strong's) then obviously it must be that He is unique or one of a kind.

Regarding the reason for the Son being unique, this would make the Father and the Holy Spirit different in this respect (meaning whatever it is that makes the Son unique) because in the same respect, it is impossible to have two or more uniques. In other words, whatever it is that makes the Son unique, it cannot have

its application to the Father or the Holy Spirit. This is only reasonable exegesis. From my own personal studies I would say that what makes the Son unique is that He is the only one begotten (sourced) of God. This would mean that neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit is begotten. Others would differ from my conclusion but whatever is decided, there must be a particular reason for saying the Son is unique. The latter point is really very important.

This claim that *monogenes* only means unique or one of a kind (without the begotten concept) is an attempt made today by many pro-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists and others to show that Christ, in His pre-existence, is not sourced of the Father. This reasoning concludes that Christ is not a real son. This is in direct contrast with the old time beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists. As we noted in the previous section, they believed that Christ is begotten of the Father therefore it was believed that in His pre-existence He really was Son of God.

Seventh-day Adventists today, because of their unbegotten belief, deny that our pioneers were correct in this matter. The pro-trinitarians say that Christ is not really the Son of God. Some say that He is given this title as a metaphor to depict the love that these two divine personalities have for each other but the author of these notes disputes this reasoning. He believes, just as the Scriptures say, that Christ really is the Son of God. He does not believe that this appellation has only a figurative meaning.

### **Allegation concerning our pioneers**

William Johnsson, as editor of the Review, made the allegation that our pioneers were wrong in what they taught concerning Christ. This was even though they did have Ellen White amongst them. He said in the Review in 1994

“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*)

He then said of this begotten belief

“Only gradually did this false doctrine give way to the Biblical truth, and largely under the impact of Ellen Whites writings in statements such as “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived. (Desire of ages p 530)” (*Ibid*)

William Johnsson is saying here that concerning the person of Christ, our pioneers were teaching “false doctrine” and not “Biblical truth”. This indeed is very strong language: also, as I am sure you will agree, it is quite an accusation. This is particularly as between 1844-1915, which is the time period when Seventh-day Adventism was established, they had God's messenger amongst them, namely Ellen White. Never though, at least I have never found it, did she say that they were wrong in their begotten belief. In fact as we noted in the

previous section, she did say herself that Christ was begotten so why should she have objected. This is why she never corrected them in this matter. In fact she agreed with them. We have seen she said “[there is not a people on earth who hold more firmly to the truth of Christ's pre-existence than do Seventh-day Adventists](#)” (see previous section). This, as Seventh-day Adventists, should be saying everything to us.

Apart from anything else, William Johnsson's remarks show us that what Seventh-day Adventists officially profess today is far different than what Seventh-day Adventists professed whilst Ellen White was alive. The official position of Seventh-day Adventists today is that our pioneers were not teaching the truth concerning God and Christ but were teaching instead false doctrine. This today is what Seventh-day Adventists are being told by their church leadership. In other words, it is what our church today is asking you and me to believe.

### **A seeming dilemma**

The witness of the early Church fathers, particularly of those who were Greek speaking, is very relevant to our begotten studies. I say this because they did not need to translate the Scriptures from one language into another but instead were reading them in their own language (meaning the common Greek). So to see how these Greek-speaking Christians described the relationship between God and Christ (which would also help us to appreciate their particular understanding of the Scriptures) we shall in this, as well as in the next section, be taking a look at their writings.

Please take note again as to **why** this is being done. It is not because the early church fathers are said to be inspired like the Bible writers, neither is to establish a theology (which at times these early church fathers did have wrong on various topics) but because far better than anyone else, they would have understood their own language. We today therefore can be helped by them as we look at the terminologies that they employed to describe what they believed was the relationship between God and Christ. As someone said to me recently, it would be an effrontery to say that we today have a better understanding of the 1st century Greek in which the New Testament was written than these Greek speaking early church fathers. I totally agree with this remark. These church fathers, better than anyone else, knew their own language. Certainly they knew it better than today's theologians.

Another point to remember is that these early church writers were exactly what they are said to be. What I mean by this is that they were not, as we are today, distanced from the Scriptures by nearly 2000 years of translating from one language into another. They were not distanced from them either by 2000 years in a physical sense. This means they would have had first hand experience of reading them in their own language. At the very worst they would have what we might term today very recent copies.

We must also remember that some of the early church fathers such as Ignatius and Polycarp actually lived during the time of the apostles. They therefore would probably have known some of them personally. This is why it can be said that they would have received the gospel from the apostles first hand. This witness of the apostles, also their converts, as well as the Scriptures themselves, was also where the early church fathers would have acquired their beliefs. In the formulation of their beliefs, all of these factors would have had their contribution.

So in an effort to explore how early Christianity regarded the relationship of Christ to the Father, we shall be making reference here to the writings of the early church fathers. These will be Ignatius, Tertullian, Justin and Origen. We shall also be taking a look at the beliefs of Arius whose objections to what was being taught by the Bishop of Alexandria in the 4th century led to the Council of Nicaea being convened (AD 325). As we have already noted in section one, this is what eventually led to the formulating of the very first trinity doctrine. We shall also be taking a look at the writings of Hilary of Poitiers. He was a Latin writer but is said to have translated from the Greek with great exactness. We shall benefit from reading some of his works regarding Christ.

In the previous section we noted what was believed by Alexander and his followers (the up and coming trinitarians) so we will not quote it again here, suffice to say that they believed that Christ, in His pre-existence, was everlastingly begotten of the Father.

It must be emphasised again that it is not being said here that these early Christian writers were inspired, neither is it being said that their theology is a correct theology, so please do not misinterpret what is being done in this and the next section. It is just a case of using their writings to note the sense of their wording (language) that they employed to describe the relationship between God and Christ. This is particularly so with respect to the unbegotten and begotten concepts. This therefore is not a theological study but one that is dealing solely with linguistics and the early Christian faith as seen through the writings of some of the early church writers.

I would ask you to remember that there were no objections from the church itself to what these early church fathers wrote with respect to Christ being begotten of God. This was the common faith held by all.

We shall first look at the writings of a man named Ignatius. He literally lived in what we would call Bible times. We touched on his writings in the previous section.

## **Ignatius**

Ignatius (also called Theophorus) was born very soon after the death and resurrection of Jesus. Some say that it was as early as AD 35, although others maintain it was a few years later. The death and resurrection of Jesus was in AD 31. Whichever date of his birth is assumed, Ignatius certainly lived during the



time of the apostles. This would have been in the time of such as Peter, Paul, James and John etc. This is something that for very obvious reasons we need to remember.

According to Eusebius of Caesarea (the church historian), Ignatius was made a bishop of Antioch around AD 69 or AD 70. It is also said that Ignatius was a convert and disciple of John the gospel writer. Whilst the exact date is unknown, history records that between AD 98 and AD 110 (a popular date is AD 107) Ignatius died in the Coliseum at Rome. This was as a martyr for his faith. It was only just previous to this that John wrote the book of Revelation, also his gospel and his three epistles. John died around the same time as Ignatius.

If as is commonly reported that Ignatius was a convert of John, then he would have known exactly what John believed. This would have been particularly so as it was written in John's gospel. Ignatius may even have read the original. As we now take note of what he said, notice how it is reminiscent of the wording of John's gospel, particularly its opening verses.

Whilst being transported to Rome, Ignatius wrote letters of encouragement to various churches. Commentators agree that the one thing that stands out in his writings is that he believed not only in the complete divinity of Christ but also in His complete humanity. In his letters, Ignatius warned his fellow Christians about certain heresies that were then, around the end of the 1st century/beginning of the 2nd century, creeping into the Christian church. Some of these beliefs concerned the two natures of Christ (the divine and the human). This I believe is why John wrote his gospel. It was to refute these heresies. Ignatius therefore would have been very conversant with them. This is evident from what he wrote. He was obviously as concerned as was John. Perhaps they had even got together in this respect. In writing to the believers at Tralleis and after appealing for unity amongst believers in Christ, Ignatius warns about those whom he terms Christ betrayers.

"I therefore, yet not I, out the love of Jesus Christ, "entreat you that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment." For there are some vain talkers and deceivers, not Christians, but Christ-betrayers, bearing about the name of Christ in deceit, and "corrupting the word" of the Gospel; while they intermix the poison of their deceit with their persuasive talk, as if they mingled aconite with sweet wine, that so he who drinks, being deceived in his taste by the very great sweetness of the draught, may incautiously meet with his death." (*Ignatius, The Epistle of Ignatius to the Trallians, Chap. VI*)

These were very strong words. They certainly sent out a very strong warning to Christians living at that time (the early AD 100s). We would also do well to heed them today.

Ignatius warns about deceit and persuasive talk that was corrupting the word of the gospel. He says that it is like mixing sweet wine with aconite, a deadly poisonous herb (varieties are also known as Monkshood, Auld Wifes Huid, Blue Rocket and Friars Cap etc) that when taken internally causes paralysis (an anaesthetic sensation) and death. It is just as though Ignatius is saying that if Christians believe these deceptions (heresies), it would bring about spiritual paralysis and death. Ignatius was referring to those who were professing to be Christian but were denying (even poisoning) some of the basic doctrines of Christianity. He lists a number of these false teachings, some of which we shall note here. He said of these promoters of heresy

“For they alienate Christ from the Father, and the law from Christ.” (*Ibid*)

This is a very interesting observation for Seventh-day Adventists. Ignatius continued

“They also calumniate His being born of the Virgin; they are ashamed of His cross; they deny His passion; and they do not believe His resurrection. They introduce God as a Being unknown; they suppose Christ to be unbegotten; and as to the Spirit, they do not admit that He exists. Some of them say that the Son is a mere man, and that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are but the same person, and that the creation is the work of God, not by Christ, but by some other strange power.” (*Ibid*)

We can see that even at this very early time in the history of Christianity (remember that Ignatius lived during the time of the apostles and their immediate converts), there were already a number of ideas, far too many to comment on here, that were being attempted to be brought into the Christian church. Note Ignatius says that some who were pursuing these ideas were denying the “passion” of Christ. This is more than likely those who were saying that the divine person had not really become flesh and that His body only appeared to be real (the latter were the docetae or better said the illusionists). John W. C. Wand who was once Archbishop of Brisbane and Bishop of London had this to say on the subject

“A third widely prevalent type of heretical thought was that of Docetism (from the Greek verb *dokein*, to seem). The Docetics taught that while Jesus was truly God His appearance as man was merely phantasmal. It is against such a view that the Johannine gospel and epistles emphasise over and over again the flesh-and-blood reality of the incarnate Son of God.” (*J. W. C. Wand, A History of the Early Church to A. D. 500, page 21, 'The Sub-Apostolic Church'*)

Others said that Jesus was a man born of normal means who was later indwelt by deity. These were all denying that Jesus was divine (the Word made flesh) and that a divine person died at Calvary. The latter is what those who uphold the trinity doctrine believe. We shall cover this in far more detail in later sections.

Note that this was around the end of the first century/beginning of the second century AD. As has been said previously, it was probably to combat these types of heresies that God inspired John to write His gospel. There is certainly plenty of evidence that this was so.

We can also see that one of the beliefs that Ignatius condemns is the belief that Christ is “**unbegotten**” (meaning not begotten). Note again he says that people who hold these views are, as he puts it, “**Christ betrayers**” and that whilst professing Christ, were actually “**corrupting the word**”. Those who say today that Christ is not begotten may do well to ponder these words. We noted in the previous section that the Bishop of Alexandria, in the 4th century, did not think very much of those who said that Christ is not begotten of God the Father. Here now is a part of a letter that Ignatius wrote to the church in Magnesia

“Let there be one common supplication, one mind, one hope, with faith unblameable in Christ Jesus, than which nothing is more excellent. Do ye all, as one man, run together into the temple of God, as unto one altar, to one Jesus Christ, the High Priest of the unbegotten God.” (*Ignatius, ‘The epistle of Ignatius to the Magnesians’*)

Ignatius clearly distinguishes between God and Christ. Note here that he refers to God as being the “**unbegotten God**” and Jesus as God’s “**High Priest**”. The latter appears to be a reference to the book of Hebrews. In his letter to the believers in Philadelphia, also when referring to the one Eucharist, Ignatius wrote

“Since, also, there is but one unbegotten Being, God, even the Father; and one only-begotten Son, God, the Word and man; and one Comforter, the Spirit of truth; and also one preaching, and one faith, and one baptism; and one Church which the holy apostles established from one end of the earth to the other by the blood of Christ, and by their own sweat and toil; it behoves you also, therefore, as “a peculiar people, and a holy nation,” to perform all things with harmony in Christ.” (*Ignatius, The Epistle of Ignatius to the Philadelphians*)

Ignatius here makes the direct comparison between the unbegotten Father and the only-begotten Son. Very important to note is that he also calls the Son of God, “**God, the Word and man**”. This was the predominant faith of Christianity. The “**Word**” was also John’s description of Christ as also was “**one only-begotten Son**”, in fact John says that the latter were the words that Christ used to describe Himself (John 3:16). The “**Comforter**” and “**the Spirit of truth**” is also John’s record of what Jesus said (see John 14:16, 14:26, 15:26, 16:7). Notice too that Ignatius is quoting 1 Peter 2:9 (“**a peculiar people, and a holy nation**”), also Ephesians 4:5 (“**one faith, and one baptism**”).

In his epistle to the Ephesians, again warning about false teachers, Ignatius wrote

“But our Physician is the only true God, the unbegotten and unapproachable, the Lord of all, the Father and Begetter of the only-begotten Son. We have also as a Physician the Lord our God, Jesus the Christ, the only-begotten Son and Word, before time began, but who afterwards became also man, of Mary the virgin.” (*Ignatius, The Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians*)

Here Ignatius describes the Father as the only true and “unbegotten” God. He also says that He is the “Begetter of the only-begotten Son”. There can be no mistaking what Ignatius is saying. The Father is the begetter whilst the Son is the begotten. Very important to note is that Ignatius said that this begetting was “before time began”, meaning way back in eternity. Certainly we can see that his usage of the concept of begotten was not simply to convey the thought that the Son of God is unique or one and only or one of a kind etc, although by saying that the Son is begotten (sourced) of the Father He can be described as such. It can also be seen that Ignatius is not saying that this begetting is metaphorical or allegorical but real (literal). Notice again that Ignatius refers to the Son as the “Word” (John 1:1).

In summary, it can be said of Ignatius that on his way to his death, he did believe that it was of paramount importance to warn the various churches about the heresies that some were attempting to bring into the Christian faith. In his letters, which consisted of both warning and encouragement, he certainly directly contrasted the unbegotten Father with the begotten Son but did say specifically that the Son of God is God. This is the begotten concept.

### **The writings of Ignatius disputed**

There is probably more mystery around the man Ignatius than any of the other early church fathers. Very little is known concerning his early life. It seems that the most we know about him is from the epistles he wrote to the various churches on his way to his death in Rome. These writings have been discovered in longer and shorter versions. This has led to huge debates as to which are the genuine (which are the original).

To dispute that Ignatius did die as a martyr for his faith and that he did write letters to the various churches, is not, in the light of all the evidence that we have, reasonable to assume. This is because there appears to be too much evidence to dispute it. Admittedly there has been found letters that are claimed to have been written by Ignatius that are spurious, but in itself this does not deny the genuine. The debate seems to boil down to which version (meaning the longer or shorter version) of the seven letters to the churches are the original (genuine) letters.

Regarding this there is much debate but there is no positive proof either way. Again it can only be decided on the weight of evidence that is found. So what exactly is the problem with these short and longer versions? The problem is not that the versions are dissimilar. In fact the two versions are very much alike. This is very much the problem. What I mean by this is that the longer version is more

detailed than the shorter (more elaborate - very similar to a paraphrase of something that was originally written in a shorter way). Certainly it is not as though the longer version is saying something entirely different than the shorter. The content and subject matter of the two versions is exactly the same. It could be said therefore that the shorter version is a cut down (more concise) version than the longer.

So what actually happened? Did someone take the original letters of Ignatius (as a shorter version) and elaborate them making them longer, or did someone take the originals (as a longer version) and abbreviate them to make them shorter (remove words from them)? Much can be reasoned either way.

When Ignatius wrote his letters, there was no such thing as the trinity doctrine. These latter debates were to come two centuries later. The early faith of Christianity was that Christ was begotten but it was devoid of later trinity reasoning (what we now call orthodox). There is also something else to consider here. This is that if all the remarks concerning begotten etc found in the letters of Ignatius are spurious (added), which is what some people are saying, then what about all the begotten remarks in the writings of all the other church fathers? Are they spurious (added) as well? This of course would be a nonsensical assumption to make.

## **Justin**

Justin was born around the year 100 AD. This was the time period (perhaps a little bit later) that John is said to have written his gospel and his epistles also the book of Revelation. Justin died around AD 165.

Justin was converted to Christianity at the age of thirty. We can see therefore that he lived during the time directly following that of the apostles and their converts. He would have received the gospel from those who had been living very near to what we might term Bible times. Justin was born around the same time that Ignatius died (see above). Whilst the early part of the life of Justin was taken up with philosophy, he eventually became a convert to Christianity. This came about because it was pointed out to him that Jesus had fulfilled the messianic prophecies found in the Jewish Scriptures and was therefore the long awaited Messiah. Justin spent most of his life helping others to have faith in the man Christ Jesus, especially those of philosophical schools.

As well as other works, Justin wrote two apologies on behalf of Christianity. In his first apology addressed to Emperor Antonius Pius (this was in reflection of his own experience, also to support His beliefs that Jesus was the Messiah of the Jewish Scriptures), he appeals to Bible prophecy. He then said

“Though we could bring forward many other prophecies, we forbear, judging these sufficient for the persuasion of those who have ears to hear and understand; and considering also that those persons are able to see that we do not make mere assertions without being able to produce proof, like those

fables that are told of the so-called sons of Jupiter.” (*First apology of Justin Martyr*, chapter LIII, ‘Summary of the prophecies’)

“For with what reason should we believe of a crucified man that He is the first-born of the unbegotten God, and Himself will pass judgment on the whole human race, unless we had found testimonies concerning Him published before He came and was born as man, and unless we saw that things had happened accordingly -- the devastation of the land of the Jews, and men of every race persuaded by His teaching through the apostles, and rejecting their old habits, in which, being deceived, they had their conversation; yea, seeing ourselves too, and knowing that the Christians from among the Gentiles are both more numerous and more true than those from among the Jews and Samaritans?” (*Ibid*)

Once again we can see that an early Christian writer described God the Father as being unbegotten. In fact Justin spoke of Christ as being the “first-born of the unbegotten God”. Notice in passing that he also said that there were more and truer Christians from the gentiles than from the Jews and Samaritans. This was around the middle of the second century of the Christian era.

Apart from this apology, Justin also recorded a dialogue that he had with a Jewish man named Trypho (sometimes referred to as Tryphon). Trypho had objected to the belief that Jesus was the Messiah. He also objected to the reasoning that Christ was God Himself in human flesh. After showing Trypho from the Scriptures that Jesus was the promised Messiah of the Old Testament Scriptures, Justin then went on to show again from the Scriptures that Jesus is God. Trypho of course, as a Jew, would have had certain knowledge of the Messianic prophecies. Justin said to him (noticeably appealing to Tryphos knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures)

“But if you knew, Trypho,” continued I, “who He is that is called at one time the Angel of great counsel, and a Man by Ezekiel, and like the Son of man by Daniel, and a Child by Isaiah, and Christ and God to be worshipped by David, and Christ and a Stone by many, and Wisdom by Solomon, and Joseph and Judah and a Star by Moses, and the East by Zechariah, and the Suffering One and Jacob and Israel by Isaiah again, and a Rod, and Flower, and Corner-Stone, and Son of God, you would not have blasphemer Him who has now come, and been born, and suffered, and ascended to heaven; who shall also come again, and then your twelve tribes shall mourn.” (*Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, chapter CXXVI, ‘The various names of Christ’*)

This really is unmistakable language. It is also a statement that is well worth reading over and over again by all Christians, especially Seventh-day Adventists. Justin lists the names by which the Old Testament Scriptures identify the Messiah. His emphasis is on Christ’s prophetic identity. Notice particularly that Justin says that Jesus is the “Christ and God to be worshipped by David”. As to what Justin believed, could this be any clearer? Very important to note here is

that Justin says that Solomon describes the begotten Son of God in His pre-existence as “Wisdom”. This is with reference to the wisdom of Proverbs chapter eight. This was the standard belief in early Christianity. We shall return our thoughts to this in far more detail in section eight which is part four of the begotten theology. Justin then added

“For if you had understood what has been written by the prophets, you would not have denied that He was God, Son of the only, unbegotten, unutterable God.” (*Ibid*)

Again it must be asked: How much clearer language could have been used? According to Justin, Jesus is God, yet He is still the begotten Son of the unbegotten God. Justin directly contrasts the Son with the unbegotten God. This is very important for us to realise.

Before we move on, let me share with you one more thing that Justin said to Trypho. He was explaining to Trypho that there was more than one divine personage. He says

“Again, when the Scripture records that God said in the beginning, 'Behold, Adam has become like one of Us,' this phrase, 'like one of Us,' is also indicative of number; and the words do not admit of a figurative meaning, as the sophists endeavour to affix on them, who are able neither to tell nor to understand the truth.” (*Ibid*)

Justin is denying anything figurative in the phrase “like one of us”. He then says (here Justin refers to the wisdom of Proverbs chapter 8 as being Christ)

“And it is written in the book of Wisdom: 'If I should tell you daily events, I would be mindful to enumerate them from the beginning. The Lord created me the beginning of His ways for His works. From everlasting He established me in the beginning, before He formed the earth, and before He made the depths, and before the springs of waters came forth, before the mountains were settled; He begets me before all the hills.' When I repeated these words, I added: "You perceive, my hearers, if you bestow attention, that the Scripture has declared that this Offspring was begotten by the Father before all things created; and that which is begotten is numerically distinct from that which begets, any one will admit." (*Ibid*)

Justin was speaking of the Son as being the “offspring”, “begotten by the Father”. He is saying that *having been begotten*, the Son of God is numerically distinct from the Father. The fact that he says the Lord “created” and “begets” this wisdom prior to His works is very important. It shows how early Christianity regarded the wording of these verses (Proverbs 8:22-31). Note very importantly here that Justin says “The Lord created”. We shall come back to this point later.

Interesting to note also is that the word “sophists” (those whom Justin is saying was placing a figurative or metaphorical meaning on the Word of God) were

Greek professional educators who travelled around as teachers of rhetoric. They excelled, it seems, in bemusing people in discussions by what some have termed flowery metaphors and dazzling figures of speech. This was philosophy. They also educated people to argue and discuss in this very same manner. In other words, these sophists taught (educated) people to argue and discuss by using terminologies of language that whilst it may not have clearly portrayed the truth, it did persuade and win the argument. To put it another way again, it seems the sophists were not so much interested in the truth as they were in winning the argument. It appears that they did not just apply their rhetoric to religious matters but also to many aspects of learning. These aspects were such as politics, orating, writing and the like.

As Christians, we should be totally the opposite of the sophists. We should be more concerned with understanding the truth rather than winning the argument. As we continue our studies on this very important subject we are studying here, I believe we would all do well to keep this in mind. We now need to move on to another of the famous early Christian writers. His name is Tertullian.

## **Tertullian**

Tertullian was born in North Africa (probably in Carthage) around AD 160. This was around the same time that Justin was martyred (AD 165). He had been born of pagan parents and his conversion to Christianity had not been until his middle 30s. He was made a priest of Carthage.

With as much vigour as he wrote against the heretics, so he wrote against the church. He regarded the church as becoming very lax in moral values. He also believed they were weak in standing for their faith. Whilst we shall not consider these latter views here, interesting to note is that this was only 150 years or so after the beginnings of Christianity.

We shall concentrate here on Tertullian's works against the heretics, particularly those against a man by the name of Praxeas. Praxeas maintained a modalistic view of God (that the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit were the same personality). After stating what he considered were the heretical views of Praxeas, Tertullian wrote the following

*"We, however, as we indeed always have done and more especially since we have been better instructed by the Paraclete [the Holy Spirit], who leads men indeed into all truth), believe that there is one only God, but under the following dispensation, or oikonomia, as it is called, that this one only God has also a Son, His Word, who proceeded from Himself, by whom all things were made, and without whom nothing was made. (Tertullian against Praxeas, chapter 2)*

Here we can see that Tertullian believed that the Son was God's Word (John 1:1) that "proceeded from Himself". This is John's gospel language. It is also begotten language. In fact it is the words that John said that Jesus spoke of



Himself. Note Tertullian actually says “this one only God has also a Son”. Tertullian’s belief was that Christ, in His pre-existence, was God therefore He was God from God. His remarks are a reference to John 8:42 where Jesus said to the Jews

“If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me.” John 8:42

Tertullian then went on to say of the Son

“Him we believe to have been sent by the Father into the Virgin, and to have been born of her - being both Man and God, the Son of Man and the Son of God, and to have been called by the name of Jesus Christ; we believe Him to have suffered, died, and been buried, according to the Scriptures, and, after He had been raised again by the Father and taken back to heaven, to be sitting at the right hand of the Father, and that He will come to judge the quick and the dead; who sent also from heaven from the Father, according to His own promise, the Holy Ghost, the Paraclete, the sanctifier of the faith of those who believe in the Father, and in the Son, and in the Holy Ghost” (*Ibid*)

This is confirmatory that Tertullian believed that the Son, in His pre-existence, was God. He then went to say in summary of his beliefs concerning the Son

“That this rule of faith has come down to us from the beginning of the gospel, even before any of the older heretics, much more before Praxeas, a pretender of yesterday, will be apparent both from the lateness of date which marks all heresies, and also from the absolutely novel character of our new-fangled Praxeas”. (*Ibid*)

This faith that Tertullian professed here he said was “from the beginning of the gospel”. This therefore was not a new faith but the faith of original Christianity. Tertullian was saying that anything that opposed it was heretical. This was the begotten faith, the faith that the creeds were later to summarise by saying that Christ was God from God, true God from true God. According to Tertullian, a begotten Christ had always been the faith of Christianity.

The whole point of Tertullian’s discourse against Praxeas was to show that God and Christ were two separate personalities and that Christ was God Himself but not the Father. Praxeas believed that in some way the Father and the Son were the same divine being. Tertullian considered this as heresy. This is why after quoting 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 he said to Praxeas

“Now, from this one passage of the epistle of the inspired apostle, we have been already able to show that the Father and the Son are two separate Persons, not only by the mention of their separate names as Father and the Son, but also by the fact that He who delivered up the kingdom, and He to whom it is delivered up -- and in like manner, He who subjected (all things),

and He to whom they were subjected -- must necessarily be two different Beings." (*Ibid. chapter 4*)

"There are some who allege that even Genesis opens thus in Hebrew: "In the beginning God made for Himself a Son." As there is no ground for this, I am led to other arguments derived from God's own dispensation, in which He existed before the creation of the world, up to the generation of the Son. For before all things God was alone - being in Himself and for Himself universe, and space, and all things. Moreover, He was alone, because there was nothing external to Him but Himself. Yet even not then was He alone; for He had with Him that which He possessed in Himself, that is to say, His own Reason. For God is rational, and Reason was first in Him; and so all things were from Himself." (*Ibid, chapter five*)

He later added

"For God is rational, and Reason was first in Him; and so all things were from Himself. This Reason is His own Thought (or Consciousness) which the Greeks call logos, by which term we also designate Word or Discourse and therefore it is now usual with our people, owing to the mere simple interpretation of the term, to say that the Word was in the beginning with God; although it would be more suitable to regard Reason as the more ancient; because God had not Word from the beginning, but He had Reason even before the beginning; because also Word itself consists of Reason, which it thus proves to have been the prior existence as being its own substance." (*Ibid*)

In harmony with John 1:1, Tertullian says that Christ pre-existed as the Word. This he says was first the "Reason" of God. Note he says that it is "now usual with our people", owing to the "mere simple interpretation" of the term, "to say that the Word was in the beginning with God". This is with reference to the word *logos*. According to Tertullian it was a word that contained a great deal of depth and richness. Tertullian was saying that "Reason" is the better understanding of *logos* because reason exists as thought before the spoken word. At the end of chapter five Tertullian concluded

"I may therefore without rashness first lay this down (as a fixed principle) that even then before the creation of the universe God was not alone, since He had within Himself both Reason, and, inherent in Reason, His Word, which He made second to Himself by agitating it within Himself." (*Ibid*)

According to Tertullian, this "Reason" that was in God was the Word. This he said came "by agitating it within Himself". It would appear that to Tertullian, this was the begetting process. Tertullian then continues by equating the Word (the Son of God) with the Wisdom of Proverbs chapter 8. He says (quoting Proverbs 8:22-25)

“Listen therefore to Wisdom herself, constituted in the character of a Second Person: "At the first the Lord created me as the beginning of His ways, with a view to His own works, before He made the earth, before the mountains were settled; moreover, before all the hills did He beget me;" that is to say, He created and generated me in His own intelligence.” (*Ibid chapter six*)

In chapter seven Tertullian said of this generating

“Thus does He make Him equal to Him: for by proceeding from Himself He became His first-begotten Son, because begotten before all things; and His only-begotten also, because alone begotten of God, in a way peculiar to Himself, from the womb of His own heart -- even as the Father Himself testifies: "My heart," says He, "has emitted my most excellent Word." (*Ibid, chapter seven*)

Here we come back to the thought of the Son proceeding from the Father which was John's record of the language of Jesus (John 3:16, John 8:42) but Tertullian, like all the other early church fathers, made no profession of understanding this begetting. He said it was “in a way peculiar to Himself” meaning that there never was another action like it. He continued

“The father took pleasure evermore in Him, who equally rejoiced with a reciprocal gladness in the Father's presence: "You art my Son, today have I begotten You;" even before the morning star did I beget You. The Son likewise acknowledges the Father, speaking in His own person, under the name of Wisdom: "The Lord formed Me as the beginning of His ways, with a view to His own works; before all the hills did He beget Me." (*Ibid*)

Tertullian was relating Psalms 2:7 and Hebrews 1:5 with Proverbs 8:22, showing that he believed the bringing forth of Wisdom in the latter is the same as the begetting of the previous texts. Notice that Tertullian interprets the wording of Proverbs 8:22 as “The Lord formed Me as the beginning of His ways” whereas it says in the KJV “The LORD *possessed me* in the beginning of his way”. We shall return our thoughts to this in section eight.

Before we continue with Tertullian's remarks I would draw your attention to where he said (this is with reference to the wisdom of chapter 8)

“The Son likewise acknowledges the Father, speaking in His own person, under the name of Wisdom: "The Lord formed Me [possessed me in the KJV] as the beginning of His ways, with a view to His own works; before all the hills did He beget Me” (see above)

Compare this with Ellen White's comments in *Patriarchs and Prophets*. This is the book that she told her children clearly depicted the faith of Seventh-day Adventism.

“And the Son of God declares concerning Himself: “The Lord possessed Me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I was set up from everlasting. . . . When He appointed the foundations of the earth: then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him: and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him.” Proverbs 8:22-30.” (*Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, page 34, ‘Why was sin permitted’*)

Ellen White is saying here exactly as did Tertullian. There was no difference whatsoever. What is this telling us today? With reference to this Wisdom Tertullian also said

“He became also the Son of God, and was begotten when He proceeded forth from Him.” (*Ibid*)

Here again this “proceeded forth” is an allusion to the words of Jesus as recorded in John 8:42 (see above). This says Tertullian is when the Wisdom of God “became” the Son of God. Note well the latter part of the sentence. This is the begotten faith. In chapter nine Tertullian had this to say

“Thus the Father is distinct from the Son, being greater than the Son, inasmuch as He who begets is one, and He who is begotten is another; He, too, who sends is one, and He who is sent is another; and He, again, who makes is one, and He through whom the thing is made is another. (*Ibid, chapter nine*)

Again we see a reference to the one “who begets” (God the Father) and “He who is begotten” (the Son of God). In chapter eleven Tertullian says to Praxeas (remember that Praxeas said that the Father was the same person as the Son)

“It will be your duty, however, to adduce your proofs out of the Scriptures as plainly as we do, when we prove that He made His Word a Son to Himself. For if He calls Him Son, and if the Son is none other than He who has proceeded from the other Himself, and if the Word has proceeded from the Father Himself, He will then be the Son, and not Himself from whom He proceeded. For the Father Himself did not proceed from Himself.” (*Ibid, chapter eleven*)

According to Tertullian, the Word was “made” the Son. Notice very importantly that he said that the Son is God but stresses that He is not the Father. As he said “the Father Himself did not proceed from Himself”. Tertullian would have agreed with Ellen White when she said

“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')*

Much more could be shown here from Tertullian's letter to Praxeas to show that he believed that Christ was truly the Son of God, God from God, true God from true God but one last statement will need to suffice. This is when Tertullian said

*"Let us, in short, examine who it is whom the apostles saw. (Ibid chapter fifteen)*

Tertullian then went on to say

*"That," says John, "which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life." Now the Word of life became flesh, and was heard, and was seen, and was handled, because He was flesh who, before He came in the flesh, was the "Word in the beginning with God" the Father, and not the Father with the Word. For although the Word was God, yet was He with God, because He is God of God; and being joined to the Father, is with the Father. "And we have seen His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father;" that is, of course, (the glory) of the Son, even Him who was visible, and was glorified by the invisible Father. And therefore, inasmuch as he had said that the Word of God was God, in order that he might give no help to the presumption of the adversary, (which pretended) that he had seen the Father Himself and in order to draw a distinction between the invisible Father and the visible Son, he makes the additional assertion, ex abundantia as it were: "No man has seen God at any time." (Ibid)*

This is very beautifully worded. Throughout his discourse, Tertullian maintains that the Father and the Son are two separate personalities yet the Son he says is God Himself begotten. He also repeatedly maintained that the Son is the Wisdom of Proverbs chapter 8. We shall see when we get to the theology sections that this is exactly what we have been told through the spirit of prophecy (the writings of Ellen White). This belief that Christ is the Wisdom of chapter 8 was not only the belief of early Christianity but was maintained by the church throughout the centuries that followed. We shall also see that Ellen White says that Christ is the personality of God shown.

What we can see here in the works of Tertullian is the understanding of early Christianity as to who was the Son of God. It was none other than God Himself in the person of His Son. This was exactly the same as early Seventh-day Adventism (whilst Ellen White was alive).

We now need to move on to section three. This is where we shall see what later Christians believed.

## **The Begotten Series**

### **Section three**

#### **The witness of early Christianity (Part 2 of 2)**

In the previous section we took note of the beliefs of a number of early Christian witnesses. Here in this section we shall be taking a look at the views of three others, namely Origen, Hilary of Poitiers and Arius. Please remember why this is being done. It is not to establish a theology but to see how early Christians expressed what they believed was the relationship between the Father and the Son. As we shall see, this relationship is that Christ is begotten of the unbegotten Father. This was the faith of very early Christianity. It was also the faith of early Seventh-day Adventists.

This early Christian faith developed. It developed towards trinitarianism. Note too that Christianity was also developing an apostate aspect whilst God's true people, holding on to the truths of God's word, would eventually be driven in the wilderness where they would be taken care of by God (see Revelation 12:6, 12:14).

#### **Origen**

Origen was born around AD 185/6, most likely in Alexandria. This was shortly after the birth of Tertullian (AD 160-235) in North Africa whom we said was born around the time that Ignatius died (AD 107). As in Tertullian's writings, we shall see in Origen's writings a developing Christian faith.

Origen, the eldest child of seven of a man by the name of Leonides, was encouraged by his father to read the Scriptures daily. He was also encouraged

to commit the Scriptures to memory. Leonides gave Origen an excellent education but it was steeped in Greek philosophy.

Whilst Origen was still in his teens, his father was cast into prison and eventually martyred for his faith. In consequence of this, at the young age of seventeen, Origen undertook the responsibility of providing for his family. This he did by opening a school in Alexandria from where he taught the Scriptures. The end of all this was that during his lifetime, he became a very famous teacher. To acquire an explanation of Scripture, many came from all walks of life to converse with him. To help him in his Biblical exegesis, Origen learned the Hebrew language. As well as helping him to translate the Old Testament Scriptures from Hebrew to Greek, this also helped him to communicate his faith (Christianity) to those of the Jewish faith. Origen's school of learning was said to be a school for those who later became martyrs for their faith.

Although not martyred himself, Origen was imprisoned and tortured in a barbaric manner but would not deny his faith. Whilst he died a natural death, it is said that his past tortures greatly contributed to it. Today, Origen is perhaps one of the best known of the early Christian writers. He is certainly known as one of the first (if not the very first) to attempt to set out a systematic theology of the Scriptures. Important to note here is that during his lifetime, there were many groups who claimed to teach the true Christian faith. This is partly what led to systematic studies of the Scriptures being made.

Origen had what can be termed as a philosophical and allegorical approach to the Scriptures. In his Biblical presentations and his theology, although he condemned pagan philosophy, he often employed the art of philosophy. Thus his reasoning was often seen to be allegorical. This allegorical method of scriptural interpretation was indicative of the school of Alexandria (Alexandrian thinking). This stood in direct opposition to the school of Antioch method (Antiochene thinking) that was very much more literal and Scripture only. For a discussion on the two schools of thought in respect to Christ, see section eight of the *Detailed History Series* here

### [A Detailed History of the Trinity Doctrine](#)

Interesting to note is that the Antiochene method of interpretation greatly emphasised that which God has accomplished through His Son becoming human. On the other hand, the Alexandrian method greatly emphasised the divinity of Christ. This was particularly so with regards to Christ being the Logos and the Eternal Word. In comparison again, the Antiochene method is based upon grammatical, historical, and contextual hermeneutics (it views allegory as weakening the meaning of Scripture) whilst the Alexandrian method is said to rely heavily on philosophy, particularly Greek philosophy.

As regarding the commentaries and books that Origen wrote, much could be said about his translating of the Scriptures. His writings can only be described as

voluminous. To give us an idea of the sheer size of his works he wrote a whole roll on the opening words of John's gospel, "In the beginning was the word" (John 1:1). Origen was ordained into the priesthood but even as a layman he was often called to preach. It is said that Jerome referred to Origen as the second teacher after Paul. Here now are four separate statements from Origen's *de Principiis* (On first principles). This was one of his first efforts of a systematic theology. This has only been preserved in Latin. It is in reference to John's gospel. Origen says

"And therefore that language which is found in the Acts of Paul, where it is said that, "here is the Word a living being," appears to me to be rightly used. John, however, with more sublimity and propriety, says in the beginning of his Gospel, when defining God by a special definition to be the Word, "And God was the Word? and this was in the beginning with God." (*Origen, 'de Principiis, book one, 'On Christ'*)

This is with reference to John 1:1. In continuing Origen wrote

"Let him, then, who assigns a beginning to the Word or Wisdom of God, take care that he be not guilty of impiety against the unbegotten Father Himself, seeing he denies that He had always been a Father, and had generated the Word, and had possessed wisdom in all preceding periods, whether they be called times or ages, or anything else that can be so entitled." (*Ibid*)

Here we see a developing view (a developing theology) of the understanding of the relationship that exists between God and His Son. This was in the 3rd century AD. Note once again that Origen, like Ignatius, Tertullian and Justin, describes God as "the unbegotten Father Himself". This cannot have the meaning of un-unique or un-one and only. That would not make sense. Note that Origen refers to "the Word or Wisdom of God". Again this is with respect to the wisdom of Proverbs chapter 8 (see verses 22-31). Note also that Origen says that this "Word" or "Wisdom" has no beginning and that it was this unbegotten God who "generated the Word". He also warns against saying that this generating had a beginning. This was now heading towards something like a trinitarian theology. This was coming out of Alexandrian thinking. This is the same concept as came out of the Council of Nicaea (AD 325) where it was said that the Son is eternally begotten of the Father. Remember Origen lived and died the century previous (ca.185 – 254 AD).

Origen's reasoning was typical of Alexandrian theology. Nowhere in Scripture does it say that the Son of God is eternally begotten (only begotten). This therefore is speculative reasoning. Note again that like the other church fathers, Origen says that Christ the Word is said to be God. He later says

"But it is monstrous and unlawful to compare God the Father, in the generation of His only-begotten Son, and in the substance of the same, to any man or other living thing engaged in such an act; for we must of necessity



hold that there is something exceptional and worthy of God which does not admit of any comparison at all, not merely in things, but which cannot even be conceived by thought or discovered by perception, so that a human mind should be able to apprehend how the unbegotten God is made the Father of the only-begotten Son. Because His generation is as eternal and everlasting as the brilliancy which is produced from the sun. For it is not by receiving the breath of life that He is made a Son, by any outward act, but by His own nature” (*Ibid, chapter II ‘On Christ’*)

Here again we can see the direct comparison between the unbegotten God (the Father) and His only-begotten Son. Note again that Origen says that the Son’s generation from the Father is eternal and everlasting. He also says that the Son was not made a Son by receiving the breath of life (created) as did other creatures in outward acts of God but “by His own nature”. Important to note is that Origen says that there is nothing in the acts of this world that can compare with the begetting of the only begotten Son of God. He says that it could not be perceived by the human mind therefore it is beyond both human comprehension and understanding. This was also Tertullian’s reasoning (see previous section). It was also the reasoning of early Seventh-day Adventists.

We can see again therefore that to the understanding of Origen, there is more to the terminology *begotten* than just being unique or one and only etc. Origen, like Justin Martyr, says that this begetting was an act of God, which he says was like no other act ever performed. Origen also had this to say

“For if the Son do, in like manner, all those things which the Father doth, then, in virtue of the Son doing all things like the Father, is the image of the Father formed in the Son, who is born of Him, like an act of His will proceeding from the mind. And I am therefore of opinion that the will of the Father ought alone to be sufficient for the existence of that which He wishes to exist. For in the exercise of His will He employs no other way than that which is made known by the counsel of His will.” (*Ibid*)

Again this is very much the same as Tertullian’s Reason of God and His Word (see previous section). He continues

“And thus also the existence of the Son is generated by Him. For this point must above all others be maintained by those who allow nothing to be unbegotten, i.e., unborn, save God the Father only.” (*Ibid*)

“And we must be careful not to fall into the absurdities of those who picture to themselves certain emanations, so as to divide the divine nature into parts, and who divide God the Father as far as they can, since even to entertain the remotest suspicion of such a thing regarding an incorporeal being is not only the height of impiety, but a mark of the greatest folly, it being most remote from any intelligent conception that there should be any physical division of any incorporeal nature.” (*Ibid*)

Here again is the emphasis that God the Father alone is unbegotten. Note here that Origen again speaks of the Son as being generated of the Father. Origen emphatically denies that anything is “unborn” except the Father. This he also refers to as a generating that is “like an act of His (God’s) will proceeding from the mind” and that “the will of the Father ought alone to be sufficient for the existence of that which He wishes to exist.” Again this is the same as Tertullian’s reasoning.

Notice something else here. Origen says that it is an absurdity that some spoke of the divine nature as being divided or God the Father being divided. He says that it is beyond human conception to believe that “there should be any physical division of any incorporeal nature”. Again this is fast becoming trinitarian theology. Note too that Origen says that the works of the Father “is the image of the Father formed in the Son”. This is also very important. A correct understanding of the Son being the express image of God (Hebrews 1:3) is to say that He is the exact likeness of the personality or character of the person of God. We shall see this in section five of this series. The latter will be the second part of our theology study. Here now is the final quote from Origen’s *On first principles* (this was in a chapter with respect to the Holy Spirit)

“From all which we learn that the person of the Holy Spirit was of such authority and dignity, that saving baptism was not complete except by the authority of the most excellent Trinity of them all, i.e., by the naming of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and by joining to the unbegotten God the Father, and to His only-begotten Son, the name also of the Holy Spirit.” (*Ibid, chapter III ‘On the Holy Spirit’*)

Here we can see again the use and sense of the words begotten and unbegotten. The terminologies are meant to distinguish between God the Father (unbegotten) and Christ the Son (begotten).

One more quote from Origen will suffice in our study of the writings of this early church father. This he wrote against Celsus who believed that Jesus was not the long awaited Messiah of the Scriptures but a leader of a seditious party.

### **Origen against Celsus**

Around the year AD 240, Origen had been given a copy of the written work of Celsus namely *The True Word* or *The True Discourse*. It has been said to be an attack on Christianity from the viewpoint of both Judaism and philosophy. Although the original work of Celsus does not now exist, Origen quotes him so precisely that it has been possible to piece together nearly all that he wrote in his work.

As well as saying that Christians act superior in knowledge to other people, the latter of whom he says are wise in themselves, Celsus accuses the Christians as being separatists. He refutes the idea that Jesus fulfilled the Messianic

requirements as required by Jewish tradition. He also claims that most of the miracles of Jesus were nothing more than idle tales or the magic practiced by the Egyptians. According to Celsus, Jesus acquired these powers during His stay in Egypt where He earned His keep as a servant before returning to Galilee claiming to be a god. Celsus denies the virgin birth and that Jesus was in any way divine, therefore he concludes that rather than being the Son of God, He was only a man born of a poor Jewish woman who, because she bore an illegitimate Child, was thrown out of her house by her husband under the accusation of adultery (so Celsus claimed). In response to all this, Origen in conclusion said

“Having completed seven books, I now propose to begin the eighth. And may God and His Only-begotten Son the Word be with us, to enable us effectively to refute the falsehoods which Celsus has published under the delusive title of A True Discourse, and at the same time to unfold the truths of Christianity with such fulness as our purpose requires.” (*Origen against Celsus, book VIII*)

Here we can see again that Origen speaks of God *and* His only-begotten Son. Note that again he speaks of two separate personalities (remember that Origen says that the substance of God was not divided because of this begetting). In response to the claims of Celsus that God would not have a Son, Origen wrote

“We, however, have learned who the Son of God is, and know that He is “the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person,” and “the breath of the power of God, and a pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty;” moreover, “the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of the power of God, and the image of His goodness.” We know, therefore, that He is the Son of God, and that God is His father.” (*Ibid, chapter XIV*)

Again there is an appeal to Hebrews 1:3 (the express image of God’s person). Over and over again, in defence of the identity of Christ, the early church fathers appealed to this verse. Note the emphasis of the last sentence. This is as Ellen White wrote in the Testimonies

“God is the Father of Christ; Christ is the Son of God. To Christ has been given an exalted position. He has been made equal with the Father. All the counsels of God are opened to His Son.” (*Ellen G. White, 8 Volume Testimonies, page 268, ‘The essential knowledge*)

Origen also made this observation

“And there is nothing extravagant or unbecoming the character of God in the doctrine that He should have begotten such an only Son; and no one will persuade us that such a one is not a Son of the unbegotten God and Father. If Celsus has heard something of certain persons holding that the Son of God is not the Son of the Creator of the universe, that is a matter which lies

between him and the supporters of such an opinion.” (*Origen against Celsus, book VIII, chapter XIV*)

Origen could not have made it any clearer. He is stressing that although ridiculed by others, Christians believe that God really does have a son. He says that no one will persuade them to think any differently. He also said that the Son of God is begotten of His unbegotten Father, the express image of God. No further comment should be necessary.

Much more could be quoted from Origen to show what he believed was the relationship between God and His Son but space here is limited. I believe though that enough has been quoted already to show the true views of this famous early Christian writer. Those today that say the Son like the Father is unbegotten are not only at direct variance with Origen but also the other early Christian writers we have quoted. This is duly recognised by the Roman Catholic Church. It noted in their *This Rock* magazine when writing about those who reject the idea that the Son is begotten therefore He is not really a son

“The Church Fathers who wrote the creeds had a different view. They recognized that the Bible depicts the Son as having his identity as the Son before his Incarnation.” (*This Rock, September 1998, ‘Who Came First, Son or Second Person?’*)

We can see here that orthodoxy would reject what the Seventh-day Adventist Church is teaching today. This is on the grounds that orthodoxy believes that Christ is truly the begotten Son of God (God from God) therefore He is none other than God Himself. I would ask you again to remember here *why* we are quoting these early Christian writers. It is not to establish a theology but to see and understand how they regarded Christ in relation to the Father. It is therefore a study in linguistics and early Christian reasoning.

These writers we have mentioned so far would have understood Greek perfectly. They certainly would have understood the language of the New Testament Scriptures (Greek). We therefore, even if we do not agree with their theology, can be helped by them to understand the terminologies used in Scripture. We shall now look at the writings of another early Christian writer although his original work would have been in Latin.

### **Hilary of Poitiers**

We could not close this section on early church witnesses without reference to the writings of Hilary of Poitiers. Whilst not a Greek writer (he wrote mainly Latin), Hilary is renowned for expounding the theological intricacies of the creed of Nicaea (this was originally written in Greek)

Hilary was born around AD 300. This was 25 years prior to the council of Nicaea. His parents (pagans of very high social standing) gave him a very good education. This included acquiring knowledge of the Greek language.

Around the age of 50, Hilary was elected Bishop of Poitiers. He vigorously defended the faith of Nicaea (the Creed of Nicaea) against the Arians although throughout his Christian experience, Arianism (some call it semi-Arianism) was the predominant faith within Christianity. Certainly it had not died out after Nicaea (AD 325) but had come very much to the fore. It was semi-Arianism that was then the ongoing predominant faith of Christianity - not the faith expounded in the Creed of Nicaea. Hilary spent a great deal of his time in combating (fighting against) this faith. He was regarded as a second Athanasius, a staunch defender of the Creed of Nicaea.

Hilary's work on the trinity is renowned. In it he emphasised the birth of the Son (the original begetting in eternity) from the Father. He also maintained, as is believed by the author of these notes, that at the incarnation, the Son lost none of His divine qualities.

We shall now take a look at some of the things that Hilary wrote in his *De Trinitate (On the Trinity)*. Please bear in mind again why this is being done. It is not to establish a theology but to see how early Christian writers explained the relationship between the Father and the Son. This is with respect to the begotten concept concerning Christ. With reference to that which he had found in John 1:1-3, Hilary said in Book 1 of his work

“Herein my soul, trembling and distressed, found a hope wider than it had imagined.” (*Hilary of Poitiers, On the trinity, book 1*)

He then added (remember this is with respect to John 1:1)

“First came its introduction to the knowledge of God the Father. Then it learnt that the eternity and infinity and beauty which, by the light of natural reason, it had attributed to its Creator belonged also to God the Only-begotten.” (*Ibid*)

This latter divine personality (“God the Only-begotten”) is the Son of God. Hilary continues concerning what he had found in John 1:1

“It did not disperse its faith among a plurality of deities, for it heard that He is God of God; nor did it fall into the error of attributing a difference of nature to this God of God, for it learnt that He is full of grace and truth. Nor yet did my soul perceive anything contrary to reason in God of God, since He was revealed as having been in the beginning God with God.” (*Ibid*)

“It saw that there are very few who attain to the knowledge of this saving faith, though its reward be great, for even His own received Him not though they who receive Him are promoted to be sons of God by a birth, not of the flesh but of faith.” (*Ibid*)

We can see from the above that Hilary refers to the Son as “God the Only-

begotten". He also said that this is the one God, "God of God" and that it was not contrary to his reason seeing that He was in the beginning "God with God". Note he refers to this as "this saving faith". In explaining what each book in his work would cover (there are 12 books altogether), Hilary said

"But, to leave no loophole for the trickery and deceit of these traducers of the true birth of God the Only-begotten, we have used His true Godhead as evidence of His true Sonship; to shew that He Who (as is confessed by all) bears the Name of Son of God is actually God, we have adduced His Name, His birth, His nature, His power, His assertions." (*Ibid*)

Hilary, against all the "trickery and deceit" of all who do not believe it, is stressing here the "true birth" of "God the only-begotten". Note this latter terminology well. We shall come back to this thought in the theology sections.

Hilary also refers to the Son's "true Godhead" as "evidence of His true Sonship" and that His designation of being the Son of God makes Him "actually God". This was the same reasoning, because they regarded the claims of Christ as being blasphemous, as the Jews who sought to kill Him (see John 5:18). Obviously neither these Jews or Hilary (or any of the other early Christian writers) regarded Christ's pre-existent Sonship as being metaphorical. They all regarded it as literal. Hilary continued

"We have proved that His Name is an accurate description of Himself, that the title of Son is an evidence of birth, that in His birth He retained His Divine Nature, and with His nature His power, and that that power manifested itself in conscious and deliberate self-revelation." (*Ibid*)

By saying "We", Hilary must be referring to Christians. He then said

"I have set down the Gospel proofs of each several point, shewing how His self-revelation displays His power, how His power reveals His nature, how His nature is His by birthright, and from His birth comes His title to the name of Son. Thus every whisper of blasphemy is silenced, for the Lord Jesus Christ Himself by the witness of His own mouth has taught us that He is, as His Name, His birth, His nature, His power declare, in the true sense of Deity, very God of very God." (*Ibid*)

Hilary says that it was the claim of Christ Himself ("by the witness of His own mouth") that He was "very God of very God". Note he says that the nature of Christ is His "by birthright" and that His pre-existent birth is the reason for Him being termed "Son". To be true to the theology of Hilary, also to be fair to him by presenting a balance of what he believed, what he said concerning book eight needs to be stated.

"While its two predecessors [books 6 and 7] have been devoted to the confirmation of the faith in Christ as Son of God and true God, the eighth

book is taken up with the proof of the unity of God, shewing that this unity is consistent with the birth of the Son, and that the birth involves no duality in the Godhead.” (*Ibid*)

Hilary was saying that this begetting of the Son did not divide the unity of God. Here again is the basis of trinity theology. He also wrote

“From a consideration of the true sense of these texts we shew that they involve the reality of the Divine birth; and then, displaying the whole series of our Lord’s self-revelations, we exhibit, in the language of Apostles and in the very words of the Holy Spirit, the whole and perfect mystery of the glory of God as Father and as Only-begotten Son.” (*Ibid*)

Again we see the emphasis on two divine personalities and the “reality of the Divine birth”. Note Hilary emphasises that “God as Father and as Only-begotten Son” is the “whole and perfect mystery of the glory of God”. Very important to note is that although Hilary refers to the Holy Spirit, he does not include Him in this glory. He then added

“Because there is a Father we know that there is a Son; in that Son the Father is manifested to us, and hence our certainty that He is born the Only-begotten and that He is very God.” (*Ibid*)

There is no real need for further comment here. The belief is only too apparent. There is a Father and there is a Son. Note that like many of the other early Christian writers, there was no urge by Hilary to prove the Holy Spirit to be a person like God and His Son. The emphasis each time is only on the Son. Never in the Scriptures or in the writings of these early Christians is there any reference to the Holy Spirit being begotten of God.

There is so much that could be quoted from Hilary to show that he believed that the Son was begotten of the unbegotten Father, suffice to say we will quote just a little from his book two. After referring to those he considered heretics he explained

“When we hear the name *Father*, is not sonship involved in that Name? The Holy Ghost is mentioned by name; must He not exist? We can no more separate fatherhood from the Father or sonship from the Son than we can deny the existence in the Holy Ghost of that gift which we receive.” (*Ibid Book II*)

Hilary then added (referring to what he regards as heretical beliefs)

“Yet men of distorted mind plunge the whole matter in doubt and difficulty, fatuously reversing the clear meaning of words, and depriving the Father of His fatherhood because they wish to strip the Son of His sonship. They take away the fatherhood by asserting that the Son is not a Son by nature; for a

son is not of the nature of his father when begetter and begotten have not the same properties, and he is no son whose being is different from that of the father, and unlike it. Yet in what sense is God a Father (as He is), if He have not begotten in His Son that same substance and nature which are His own?" *(Ibid)*

Hilary is saying that the Son of God, because He is of the nature of God, is a true Son. He went on to say that those who do not believe the Son to be of the same nature as the Father are stripping the Son of His Sonship. Note again the reference to the "begotten" and the "begetter". Hilary later wrote (and this really is very interesting)

"The Father is what He is, and as He is manifested, so we must believe. The mind shrinks in dread from treating of the Son; at every word I tremble lest I be betrayed into treason. For He is the Offspring of the Unbegotten, One from One, true from true, living from living, perfect from perfect; the Power of Power, the Wisdom of Wisdom, the Glory of Glory, the Likeness of the invisible God, the Image of the Unbegotten Father." *(Ibid)*

"Yet in what sense can we conceive that the Only-begotten is the Offspring of the Unbegotten?" *(Ibid)*

He answers his own question by explaining

"Repeatedly the Father cries from heaven, This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased. It is no rending or severance, for He that begat is without passions, and He that was born is the Image of the invisible God and bears witness, *The Father is in Me and I in the Father.* *(Ibid)*

Now notice these next words. This is why I said this statement was really very interesting.

"It is no mere adoption, for He is the true Son of God and cries, *He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father also.* Nor did He come into existence in obedience to a command as did created things, for He is the Only-begotten of the One God; and He has life in Himself, even as He that begot Him has life, for He says, *As the Father hath life in Himself, even so gave He to the Son to have life in Himself.*" *(Ibid)*

Hilary is saying that Christ is a son not because He was adopted; neither is He a son because He was created, but that He was a Son because He is "the Only-begotten of the one God".

Why I say this is interesting is because we have been told through the spirit of prophecy (we noted this in section one)

"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, 'Christ our complete salvation'*)

This is exactly the same as we have just seen said by Hilary of Poitiers. The only difference as far as I can see is that Hilary stressed that the Son was of and belonging to the one nature of God (the trinity view), a profession never made by Ellen White although she did say (probably in consequence in some saying that God and Christ did have an ontological oneness)

"There are light and glory in the truth that Christ was one with the Father before the foundation of the world was laid. This is the light shining in a dark place, making it resplendent with divine, original glory. This truth, infinitely mysterious in itself, explains other mysterious and otherwise unexplainable truths, while it is enshrined in light, unapproachable and incomprehensible." (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 5th April 1906, 'The Word made flesh'*)

This was written during the Godhead crisis of the early 1900s within Seventh-day Adventism. Ellen White is saying here that before the foundation of this world, there was obviously a oneness between God and Christ but she quickly added that it is "enshrined in light, unapproachable and incomprehensible". Note she says that whatever this oneness was, it "explains other mysterious and otherwise unexplainable truths". In this trinity debate within Seventh-day Adventism, this statement of Ellen White is obviously of the utmost importance. If you wish to read the entire article please click [here](#).

This was as far as Ellen White went with this reasoning. Certainly she never said that this oneness (whatever it was) was indivisible (as in the trinity doctrine); neither did she ever say that the Son was part of God. It is also interesting that Hilary went on to say that God has never revealed the manner of this begetting

"The manner of this birth is therefore a secret confined to the Two." (*Hilary of Poitiers, On the trinity, book 2*)

This was the same as we have seen said by Tertullian and Origen. Notice that Hilary makes no mention of the Holy Spirit knowing this "secret".

"If any one lays upon his personal incapacity his failure to solve the mystery, in spite of the certainty that Father and Son stand to Each Other in those relations, he will be still more pained at the ignorance to which I confess. I, too, am in the dark, yet I ask no questions. I look for comfort to the fact that Archangels share my ignorance, that Angels have not heard the explanation, and worlds do not contain it, that no prophet has espied it and no Apostle sought for it, that the Son Himself has not revealed it." (*Ibid*)

“Let such pitiful complaints cease. Whoever you are that search into these mysteries, I do not bid you resume your exploration of height and breadth and depth; I ask you rather to acquiesce patiently in your ignorance of the mode of Divine generation, seeing that you know not how His creatures come into existence.” (*Ibid*)

Hilary makes it clear that because God has never revealed it, all creation stands in ignorance as to how the Father begets (generates) the Son.

We need now to draw to a close in this study of the writings of Hilary of Poitiers. In doing so we will offer just one more quote from his writings although a vast number of similar statements could be found. This is where he said

“Penetrate into the mystery, plunge into the darkness which shrouds that birth, where you will be alone with God the Unbegotten and God the Only-begotten. Make your start, continue, persevere. I know that you will not reach the goal, but I shall rejoice at your progress. For He who devoutly treads an endless road, though he reach no conclusion, will profit by his exertions. Reason will fail for want of words, but when it comes to a stand it will be the better for the effort made” (*Ibid*)

Note here the emphasis again on “God the Unbegotten and God the Only-begotten”, the latter being the Son of God. He said in the next paragraph

“The Son draws His life from that Father Who truly has life: the Only begotten from the Unbegotten, Offspring from Parent, Living from Living. As the Father hath life in Himself, even so gave He to the Son also to have life in Himself. The Son is perfect from Him that is perfect, for He is whole from Him that is whole. There is no division or severance, for Each is in the Other, and the fullness of the Godhead is in the Son.” (*Ibid*)

Hilary is saying that the Son has no existence outside of the Father. This is exactly what we have been told through the spirit of prophecy.📖 In 1890 Ellen White wrote

"The world's Redeemer was equal with God. His authority was as the authority of God. He declared that he had no existence separate from the Father. The authority by which he spoke, and wrought miracles, was expressly his own, yet he assures us that he and the Father are one." (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald 7th Jan 1890, 'Christ revealed the Father'*)

Hilary concluded

“Incomprehensible is begotten of Incomprehensible, for none else knows Them, but Each knows the Other; Invisible is begotten of Invisible, for the Son is the Image of the invisible God, and he that has seen the Son has seen the Father also. There is a distinction, for They are Father and Son; not that Their

Divinity is different in kind, for Both are One, God of God, One God Only begotten of One God Unbegotten. They are not two Gods, but One of One; not two Unbegotten, for the Son is born of the Unborn.” (*Hilary of Poitiers, On the Trinity book 2*)

Notice here again that the Holy Spirit is omitted (“none else knows Them”)

As has been said, much more could be quoted from Hilary of Poitiers but no matter how is quoted, we would see that it would only confirm what we have already seen was said by him. This is that because Christ is begotten of the unbegotten God, God from God, true God from true God, (God begotten), then He is true Son, or, if you wish to look at the other way around, the Scriptures refer to Christ as the Son of God therefore He must be begotten (sourced) of the Father. This was the faith of early Christianity.

Very interesting is that Hilary, in his explanation of this mystery of the unbegotten and the begotten God, expounded in Latin the precise intricacies as how it was explained in the Greek language by the early Christian fathers. Hilary also went on his book II to give a wonderful discourse on the opening verses of John’s gospel, also the incarnation and the Holy Spirit.

### **Arius and his beliefs**

There is no doubt that the early Christian faith was that Christ is begotten of the Father. Even at the first ecumenical Council at Nicaea (AD 325) - although it was the coeternity of Christ that was in question - it was not doubted by either side in this dispute that Christ was begotten of God. This can be clearly seen in letters written by the two main contenders in this controversy, namely Alexander the Bishop of Alexandria and Arius one of the bishop’s presbyters.

In section one we quoted from a letter written by Alexander showing that his belief was that Christ was everlastingly (eternally) begotten of the one unbegotten God so we will not quote it again here, suffice to say he said that those who did not believe it (that Christ is begotten) were those whom have their intellects blinded. If you remember, another rendering of this remark was deficient in intellectual power (see also section one). What we will do here is to show what Arius believed. Like we did with Alexander, we shall quote from a letter he wrote explaining his faith. This was a letter written by him to his good friend Eusebius of Nicomedia (not to be confused with Eusebius of Caesarea who was also a very good friend of Arius).

Arius makes reference to the beliefs of Alexander and his followers (these were beliefs that said that the Son was *everlastingly* begotten of God and belonging to the *same substance* of God – now orthodox trinitarianism). Arius wrote

“These are impieties to which we cannot listen, even though the heretics threaten us with a thousand deaths.” (*Arius to Eusebius of Nicomedia, Theodoret’s History, chapter page*)

Take note of those whom Arius is calling “heretics”. Arius is calling heretics those who believe the same as Alexander (now the trinitarians). Arius was saying that what Alexander believed was not in keeping with that which was then commonly taught within 4th century Christianity. It does appear therefore that a begotten faith concerning Christ, without the extreme of everlastingly begotten, was the early Christian faith. This same presbyter went on to say about his and his follower’s beliefs

“But we say and believe, and have taught, and do teach, that the Son is not unbegotten, nor in any way part of the unbegotten; and that He does not derive His subsistence from any matter; but that by His own will and counsel He has subsisted before time, and before ages, as perfect God, only begotten and unchangeable, and that before He was begotten, or created, or purposed, or established, He was not. For He was not unbegotten.” (*The ecclesiastical history of Theodoret, Book 1, Chapter 4, ‘The letter of Arius to Eusebius, Bishop of Nicomedia’*)

Just like Alexander and the vast majority of Christians living at that time, Arius believed that the Son was begotten of God. We can also see that again like Alexander, Arius believed the Son is God Himself. Arius though (in opposition to what many say that he believed), does not say that the Son was a created being. That much he makes very clear because he does say that the Son “by His own will and counsel He has subsisted before time, and before ages, as perfect God, only begotten and unchangeable”.

It does appear therefore that Arius believed that the Son of God is God Himself begotten, not that He was a created being as people say that he believed. This is why I say that Arius and his beliefs are today very much abused. Certainly they are very much misrepresented. Note that Arius says that it was in His pre-existence that the Son was unchangeable. He was not referring here to the incarnation or its possible consequences for Christ. He was just establishing to all who would read his letter what he believed concerning the pre-existent Christ. Arius in his letter added

“We are persecuted, because we say that the Son has a beginning, but that God is without beginning. This is the cause of our persecution, and likewise, because we say that He is of the non-existent. And this we say, because He is neither part of God, nor of any essential being. For this are we persecuted; the rest you know. I bid thee farewell in the Lord, remembering our afflictions, my fellow-Lucianist.” (*The ecclesiastical history of Theodoret, Book 1, Chapter 4, ‘The letter of Arius to Eusebius, Bishop of Nicomedia’*)

The difference in beliefs between Arius and Alexander was that Arius believed that the Son was begotten at a point in eternity, therefore believing that as a separate individual from the Father (although believing He was God essentially), His personality had a beginning. This was similar as Tertullian who said that before Christ was begotten He existed as the “Reason” of God (see previous

section). In contrast to this, Alexander believed that the Son was eternally begotten and belonging to the one substance of God (the one being of God) and was therefore His personality was without beginning (orthodox trinitarianism). This was like saying that the Son is a part of God. Note Arius said that his belief was that Christ “[is neither part of God, nor of any essential being](#)”.

Both Arius and Alexander believed that the Son was begotten of God, meaning God from God, although Alexander believed, because Arius did not express it in exactly the same way as he did, that his opponent was wrong in his theology. This is no different than what trinitarians say today of those non-trinitarians who hold to similar beliefs as Arius. I would ask you now to very importantly note the last sentence in that letter. Arius referred to Eusebius (of Nicomedia) as his “[fellow-Lucianist](#)”. Now why did he do that?

Lucian was head of a theology school in Antioch (where Ignatius had earlier been a church leader). He is remembered for his accuracy of Scripture translation and for expressing its literal, no frills interpretation. He did in fact make a translation of the whole Bible known as the Lucian Recension, which as well as being commonly used by Christians living in his time, was also used by Jerome in his compilation of the Latin Vulgate. What we also know for sure is that Arius, like Eusebius of Nicomedia, was a pupil of Lucian, hence the reason for him calling Eusebius “[my fellow Lucianist](#)”. Arius must have considered himself and his friend as having the same beliefs as Lucian (of the same school of thinking as Lucian).

Within Christianity, there has always been an antagonism between Antiochene thinking and Alexandrian thinking. The former is very practical and very much Sola Scriptura whilst the latter is very much allegorical (Scripture explained by using philosophy). It was the Alexandrian thinking that led to the formulation of the trinity doctrine. Those of the Antiochene thinking, like Arius and Eusebius of Nicomedia, opposed it. They said it was not Scriptural. Note something very interesting here regarding our previous considerations of Ignatius.

Ignatius was of Antioch. In fact he was at one time a leader (some use the term bishop) of the church in this city. He must have been a very influential figure. The Romans transported him all the way to Rome to die. They obviously wanted to make a spectacle of him, an example of what could happen to any who professed the Christian faith. In other words, the martyrdom of Ignatius was meant by the Romans to be a deterrent against the rise of Christianity. If they had just wanted to kill him they could have saved on the time, effort and expense of taking him to Rome by killing him at Antioch. This though would probably not have suited their purposes.

This insight of Ignatius being of Antioch gives us additional evidence that the longer version of his letters (as we spoke of above), that includes the same Lucian/Arian theology as we have just seen, is the original and the genuine (the begotten faith). In other words, the reasoning of Ignatius was on a par with

Antiochene theology.

## Two opposing theologies

Benjamin Wilkinson (a Seventh-day Adventist minister) said in his book *Truth Triumphant* (a 1944 Seventh-day Adventist publication)

“In these words, the historian Newman aptly describes the difference between the theology of Antioch and that of Alexandria.” (*Benjamin Wilkinson, Truth Triumphant, page 25, chapter ‘The Apostolic Origins of the Church in the Wilderness’ footnote; Newman, A Manual of Church History, vol. 1 p. 297*)

Wilkinson then quotes Newman as saying

“In the great christological controversies of the fourth and following centuries Alexandria and Antioch were always antagonists, Alexandria representing a mystical transcendentalism and promoting the allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures; Antioch insisting on the grammatico-historical interpretation of the Scriptures, and having no sympathy with mystical modes of thought.” (*Ibid*)

It is in this difference that to a great extent is seen the problem that has existed in all of the past trinity debates. It is exactly the same in the present debate over the trinity doctrine within Seventh-day Adventism. The non-trinitarians are basing their beliefs purely on divine revelation (Scripture and the writings of Ellen White) whilst the trinitarians are including philosophical reasoning and speculation (that which God has not revealed). In other words, in their thinking, the non-trinitarians are Antiochene whilst the trinitarians are Alexandrian.

The beliefs of Arius (Antiochene thinking) appear to be very similar as believed by the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism whilst the beliefs of Alexander (Alexandrian thinking) are very similar to the trinitarians. Having said that: Orthodoxy is not descriptive of current Seventh-day Adventist trinitarian theology. This is because it says that the Son is *not* begotten of the Father therefore Christ, in His pre-existence, is not truly the Son of God. The latter though are very much like the Alexandrians in their philosophical thinking (speculative theology). They resort to believing such that God has not revealed.

## Summary

In summary, what can we say concerning the beliefs of the early church fathers?

It appears unquestionable that these church fathers believed that the Father was unbegotten and the Son begotten of Him (God from God, a true son), also that because of this begetting, the Son is God Himself begotten. In fact it could be said that the Son was the author of His own existence. This, as we have seen in this section was the belief of Arius, although like many others such as Hilary, he did not believe that the Son was part of (belonging to) God Himself (the trinity concept).

The Greek early church fathers did not need to translate the Scriptures from one

language to another but read it in their own tongue. So from where did they get this idea of an unbegotten Father and a begotten Son? They must have derived their beliefs from the Scriptures and the witness of the apostles. As has been said before, it would seem an effrontery to conclude that we today have a better understanding of the Greek language than the early church fathers whose common tongue was Greek. It behoves us therefore to take into serious consideration what they said with respect to the Father and Son begotten concept. Whilst these last two sections are not intended to serve as a theology, that which the early church writers said in this respect cannot and must not be ignored. It must be of a certain relevance.

In the next section we shall, from a Scriptural point of view, be looking at the word *monogenes*. This will help us greatly in understanding the meaning of this word. This will also help us to understand why the early Church fathers believed as they did although their beliefs concerning Christ being begotten of God were not totally dependant on this one word. They believed as says the Scriptures that Christ is a true son (the Son of God) therefore this was the basis of their beliefs. We shall cover the biblical concept of this Sonship in section six.

Strange to relate is that the Seventh-day Adventist Church today totally rejects the begotten reasoning of these early church fathers. In doing so they also reject what the pioneers, including Ellen White, believed and taught. They say that the Son is not begotten of God and that in His pre-existence He is not the Son of God. In fact they even go to the point of saying that if Christ is spoken of as being begotten (sourced of the Father – a true Son) then this is making Him a lesser god than God the Father (we shall see this in later sections). This though was far from the reasoning of early Christians. It was also far from the reasoning of the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism. This includes Ellen White. They all believed that the Son of God is none other than God Himself begotten.

We shall now go to section four where we shall discuss the word *monogenes*.

## **The Begotten Series**

### **Section four**

#### **Monogenes**

With respect to the concept of a begotten or an unbegotten Christ, there is much debate within Seventh-day Adventism over an understanding of the Greek word *monogenes*. Whilst in this section we will be taking a look at its meaning, it is just as important to reason why this word was used, particularly with respect to John's usage of it in relation to Christ. In other words, it is not just a case of what does the word *monogenes* actually mean but rather what was the idea (thought) that the Bible writers meant to convey by their employment of it. The latter is just as important as the former, perhaps even more important.

In the King James Version of the Scriptures (from hereon referred to as KJV), as it pertains to the Son of God, the word begotten is translated from various Greek words. In John 1:14, 1:18, 3:16, 3:18 and 1 John 4:9 it is translated from



*monogenes*. In Acts 13:33, Hebrews 1:5, 5:5 it is from the Greek *gennoa* meaning to procreate (also being born of etc) whilst in Revelation 1:5 it is from *protokos*. Interesting is that John is the only Bible writer who applies the word *monogenes* to Jesus.

### John and 'monogenes'

John's gospel is very unlike the synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. This is because he probably wrote it to refute the heresies that at that time (the end of the first century) were stealthily creeping into the early Christian Church. His gospel therefore was a divinely inspired theology. It was to prove that Jesus Christ really is the Son of God (see John 20:31). This was the whole point of him writing his gospel. This goes a long way in helping us to understand the meaning of *monogenes*. In section six we shall see that the terminology Son of God is not in any way to be thought of as metaphorical (figurative) but literal. Regarding John's usage of the word *monogenes*, the verses in which this word is found are as follows

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten (*Gr. monogenes*) of the Father,) full of grace and truth." John 1:14

"No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten (*Gr. monogenes*) Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." John 1:18

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

"He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten (*Gr. monogenes*) Son of God." John 3:18

"In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten (*Gr. monogenes*) Son into the world, that we might live through him." 1 John 4:9

John used *monogenes* as a word that theologically expresses the pre-incarnate (pre-existent) relationship between God and Christ. This was a parent-child relationship. This was obviously the divinely inspired thought that led John to use this word. The latter is very important to realise. This has nothing to do with the incarnation. We are talking here in terms of Christ's pre-existence. In the recent Seventh-day Adventist publication *The Trinity*, Woodrow Whidden wrote with reference to the use of begotten (*monogenes*) as in John 1:18

"The expression "the only begotten Son is, however replaced in most contemporary English versions with either "the only begotten God" (NASB) or "God the one and only" (NIV)." (*Woodrow Whidden, 'The Trinity' pages 54-55 'The Full and Eternal Deity of Christ – part II*)

Whidden then adds as an explanation of his reasoning

“The reason for this more striking testimony to the deity of Christ is that the most reliable and ancient Greek manuscripts of the New Testament have the reading *monogenes theos* (“only begotten God” or “one and only God,” or “unique God”) in place of *monogenes huos* (“only begotten Son” or “one and only Son” or “unique Son”) (*ibid*)

Here we can see it said that the word *monogenes* is found in the New Testaments “most reliable and ancient Greek manuscripts”. We can also see it said that these same manuscripts say “only begotten God” or “one and only God,” or “unique God” rather than as some translations have it as the only begotten Son.

These conclusions are very one sided. This is because regarding the extant manuscripts, there is a great deal of dispute over it. It does appear that the majority of early manuscripts say *monogenes huos* (son) whilst *monogenes theos* (God) are traced mainly back to Alexandrian manuscripts. Having said that, it is disputable as to what qualifies as the most reliable manuscripts. The oldest does not necessarily mean the best.

There is also the evidence of the early church fathers. To the best of my knowledge, the majority of references to Christ and John 1:18 say only begotten Son. There is very little reference to Him being the only begotten God. This brings Whidden’s conclusions above into dispute.

Nevertheless, if Christ is of God, then He must be God begotten but not another god begotten. Needless to say, it must have been from John’s writings that in the main the early church fathers would have derived their begotten Son concept although the verses of Proverbs 8:22-31 play a major part. This is because they tell of Christ being brought forth of God. John’s gospel compliments these verses – particularly his use of *monogenes* with respect to Christ.

## **Monogenes**

According to Strong’s concordance, *monogenes* is compounded of two separate words, namely *monos* and *ginomai*. It says

“3439 ... *Monogenes* ... from 3441 and 1096; Only-born, i.e. sole - only (begotten, child) (*James Strong, LL.D., S.T.D., The New Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, New Strong’s Concise Dictionary of the words in the Greek Testament, page 59*)

In the KJV, *monos* is often rendered alone or only. These are texts such as Matthew 4:10, Matthew 17:8, 1 Corinthians 9:6, 2 Timothy 4:11, Jude 1:4 etc (only) and Matthew 18:15, Mark 6:47, John 6:15, 8:16, Galatians 6:4 etc (alone). In other places it is translated themselves (Mark 9:2 and Luke 24:12). We can

see therefore, that from the scriptural usage of this word it has a very obvious meaning. Mono is the prefix we generally use for understanding one only as in monochrome (one colour), monotone (one tone) and monogamy (one spouse at one time) etc.

The other transliterated word ginomai, as translated in the KJV New Testament, has a more varied application. By the gospel writers alone it is translated done over 50 times and came (as in came to pass) also over 50 times. It is also translated, come, become, made and fulfilled. Strong's describes it as a word that is translated in the KJV as be assembled, be (come), be (brought to pass), arise, continue etc. Strong's also describes this word as

“A prolongation and middle voice form of a primary verb; ‘to cause to be’ (“gen”-erate) i.e. reflexively to become (come into being)” (see *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, New Strong's Concise Dictionary of the words in the Greek Testament, page 19*).

Being a verb, ginomai means that it is a part of speech expressing either action, or the results of action. As we were all taught in school, a verb is a doing or something done or something happening part of speech (an action or doing word). Putting these two parts of the word together (monos and ginomai), it is reasonable to conclude that *monogenes* has a meaning such as the only one that has come to pass or, the only one who has been brought to pass (has happened) or the only one to come into being and in application does have, according to Strong's Concordance, the meaning of “**only-born, i.e. sole - only (begotten, child)**” (see above). This makes *monogenes* to be an adjective, a describing word.

I would therefore reason that John recorded Jesus as saying of Himself (John 3:16) that He was the only one who is **come to pass** or who has been **brought to pass**” of God. This would mean of course that the Son of God can also be correctly described as being either unique or one and only or even, as we shall see later, **God Himself begotten**. As we have noted in previous sections, the latter was the view of early Christian writers. John obviously had very good reason for using *monogenes*. It must also be remembered that he probably wrote his gospel to refute the heresies that were then, in the 1st century, creeping into the early Christian church. This means that regarding his selection of words to describe the pre-existent relationship of Christ to God, he would have been very careful indeed.

*Monogenes* definitely denotes a parent-child relationship. This, concerning Christ, was the integral part of John's theology. It was this theology that would stand as a bulwark against the errors that were then creeping into the early Christian church. It would also stand against those heresies that some would attempt to bring in as the centuries passed.

**I AM THAT I AM (I will be what I will be)**

As recorded in John 8:58, Jesus identified Himself with the “I AM” of Exodus 3:14-15. This is when in controversy concerning fathers He said to the Jews “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.” Regarding these words J. F. McLaughlin noted in the 1929 Abingdon Bible Commentary

“The words I am that I am are evidently intended as an interpretation of the name “Jehovah” which was pronounced in Hebrew *Yahweh*. According to the popular etymology of this passage, the Hebrew word was understood to be the third person singular masculine of the imperfect tense of the verb “to be” in its older form (found in a few instances in the Hebrew text and common in Aramaic), meaning “He is”, “ or “He will be”; or, if regarded as derived from the causative stem of the verb, “He causes to be.” (*J. F. McLaughlin, B.D. D.D. Dean and Professor of Old Testament Exegesis and Literature, Faculty of Theology, Professor of Oriental Languages and Literature, Faculty of Arts, Victoria University, Toronto. The Abingdon Bible Commentary 1929 page 256*)

Not all versions of the Bible translate God’s description of Himself (to Moses) as “I AM THAT I AM” but say instead “I will be what I will be” (see Exodus 3:14-15). Some commentators say that this phrase could be easily interpreted as saying “I am becoming what I am becoming”. This would tie in with the conclusion that the Son is the personality of God Himself made visible (God begotten) yet a separate personality from God the Father. We shall see in the next section that this is what we have been told through the spirit of prophecy. We now need to turn our attention to the expression “I AM” as it is found in Exodus 3:14-15.

When Moses turned aside to take a look at the burning bush (because it was burning but not consumed), God introduced Himself to this faithful patriarch as “the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (see Exodus 3:6). We can see from this that God did not leave it to the imagination of Moses to determine who it was that was speaking to him. God then told Moses that He (God) had chosen him (Moses) to bring the children of Israel out from their Egyptian bondage. This is when Moses asked God what **name** he should say when the children of Israel asked who had sent him (remember, God had already identified Himself to Moses as “the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”). The Scriptures then record

“And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. Exodus 3:14

God did not tell Moses that he was simply to say that the God of their Fathers or the God of Abraham or the God of Isaac or the God of Jacob had sent him but “I AM”.

This expression “I AM” (Heb. *hayah*) means “to become to be (come to pass or become etc). In the latter sense, it is used extensively. For examples of its usage see Genesis 2:7 (became), 3:22 (become), 4:14 (come, as in come to pass),

Genesis 11:3 (had), Genesis 13:3 (been) and Genesis 15:1 (came) etc. The Greek verb ginomai is the equivalent to the Hebrew hayah. It is constantly used this way (translating hayah) in the Septuagint, which is a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. This ties in with the concept of ginomai as in *monogenes* (see above)

Very interesting and also very significant to note is that instead of the words “I AM THAT I AM” as in the KJV, some Bibles have “I will be what I will be”, either that or they say that the latter interpretation is a valid alternative. Take for example the Complete Jewish Bible. It says in its translation of Exodus 3:14

“God said to Moshe, "Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh [I am/will be what I am/will be]," and added, "Here is what to say to the people of Isra'el: 'Ehyeh [I Am or I Will Be] has sent me to you.'" *Exodus 3:14 (Complete Jewish Bible, copyright © 1998 by David H. Stern. Published by Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc. Distributed by Messianic Jewish Resources. [www.messianicjewish.net](http://www.messianicjewish.net). All rights reserved. Used by permission.)*

Here we can see that this recent Jewish translation of the Scriptures uses in this verse the Hebrew term Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh and puts in parenthesis as an alternative reading “I am/will be what I am/will be” (note particularly here the consonants HYH). This translation is very interesting because in the Miles Coverdale translation (the very first printed English translation of the complete Bible) it says in 16th century English language

“God saide vnto Moses: I wyl be what I wyll be. And he sayde: Thus shalt thou saye vnto ye children of Israel: I wyl he hath sent me vnto you.” Exodus 3:14 Miles Coverdale translation.

Using 21st century English we would say “God said unto Moses: I will be what I will be. And he said: thus shalt thou say unto the children if Israel: I will he hath sent me unto you.” It is also interesting to note here that Miles Coverdale (1487-1569) is perhaps one of the lesser-known heroes of the reformation. This was especially so in regards to the reformation in such countries as England, Germany, Austria, Switzerland and those across Scandinavia.

Coverdale (a Yorkshire man born in the North Riding village of Coverham in England) is probably best known for producing the first printed English translation of the complete Bible. His completed work was printed in Zurich in 1535 although this was not all his own work. He had been working with William Tyndale (up to the time of Tyndale's martyrdom) to bring the Scriptures to the English in their own language. Whilst Tyndale lived to see his New Testament translation in print, he never finished translating the Old Testament. This work was completed by Coverdale (using other translations) and was seen to a great extent in the first printed English translation of the complete Bible.

Another interesting point is that the New International Version (which some

purport to have used the best available manuscripts) has a footnote for Exodus 3:14. It says (as an alternative reading for “I AM THAT I AM)

“or I will be what I will be” (footnote, Exodus 3:14 New International Version)

A similar footnote is also found in the New English Bible. This one says

“I am ... I am or I will be what I will be” Footnote to Exodus 3:14 New English Bible”

I have found in my studies that as an alternative to “I AM THAT I AM”, there are many commentaries and lexicons that give the rendering “I will be what I will be”. One such commentary that had over 60 contributors is the 1919 Peake’s commentary. These contributors were such as professors of Bible languages and professors of Biblical exegesis etc. This commentary says with reference to Exodus 3:14

“I will be that I will be” is supported by Robertson Smith, Davidson, Driver, M’Neile, and others (the meaning will be more clearly conveyed to the English reader by the translation, “I will be what I will be.” – A.S.P. (*Rev George Harford, M.A. Hon. Canon of Liverpool, Peake's Commentary on the Bible, 1919 page 172*)

Here we are told that to the English reader, the Hebrew phrase that is usually translated “I AM THAT I AM” will be better understood by the rendering “I will be that I will be”. The Reverend Harford who contributed this commentary then said

“It brings out the implications both of the root and tense of the verb *hayah*. The root denotes rather becoming than being, and the tense (imperfect) marks uncompleted process or activity.”

Note again here the consonants HYH. Note also that the commentary says that the root of *hayah* denotes “becoming” more so than “being” and the imperfect tense denotes “uncompleted process or activity”. The latter is very important.

In another book on Old Testament theology, I found a statement that I also believe is very interesting. This one says

“First let us examine the words that follow from Moses' request for the name of the God who has spoken to him.” (*George A. F. Knight, 'A Christian Theology of the Old Testament' pages 40-41, 'God known in His Self-Revelation'*)

Knight then says

“The Hebrew for those capitalised words is 'EHYEH 'ASHER 'EHYEH. The verbal form of 'EYEH' is the third person singular masculine imperfect of the verb 'HAYAH'. This verb 'HAYAH' does not mean 'to be'. It is more nearly understood by the verb 'to become' in English ... though we cannot totally

exclude the idea of 'being'." (*Ibid*)

This same author later says

"The word 'EHYEH' is in this 'imperfect' form of the verb. 'EHYEH' is just as rightly translated by our future tense as by our present tense. Therefore it is just as correct to translate it by 'I shall become what I shall become', as by the phrase 'I am becoming what I am becoming'." (*Ibid*)

Notice here that this name of God is spoken of in connection with His continuing self-revelation through His ongoing divine presence, also that in both of these previous statements the writers said that the words spoken by God ("I AM THAT I AM" or "I will be what I will be") is in the imperfect tense (imperfect form of the verb). This denotes a continuing action.

The Hebrew language is very much verb orientated. Much importance is placed on the understanding of their usages. Unlike in Greek or English, verbs are not considered exactly as past, present or future tenses but rather perfect or imperfect, a complete or incomplete action. The imperfect, as in "I AM THAT I AM" or "I will be what I will be", denotes that which is not yet complete but is still ongoing. This is why it can be said that God was saying to Moses, "I am becoming what I am becoming" meaning that through the dynamism of His own divine personal presence, God is revealing Himself (a self-revelation). This is in keeping with the begotten concept. The Son of God is God Himself begotten. This was a continuing revelation of Himself through an ongoing becoming.

Very interesting to note here is that In the New World Translation of the Scriptures (the Jehovah's Witnesses translation), Exodus 3:14 is translated as saying

"At this God said to Moses: "I SHALL PROVE TO BE WHAT I SHALL PROVE TO BE" And He added: This is what you are to say to the sons of Israel, I SHALL PROVE TO BE has sent me to you.'" Exodus 3:14 New World Translation

It is just as though God is saying here, "I will be what I will be seen to be".

### **By what name (character)**

By saying to Moses "I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (see Exodus 3:6), God had already identified Himself to Moses, therefore when Moses asked God for the name of the one who had sent him, it seems that he was not asking God **who** He was but rather **what** He was (His character).

Moses actually asked God "Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them? (see Exodus

3:13). Moses asked God what name (when he was asked) should he say was the God of their fathers? The Hebrew word used here is transliterated *shem* and is the common word for name (see Genesis 2:11, 20, 3:20, 11:20 etc). Much could be said here with regards to the Hebrew concept of name but what we would see is that it has everything to do with the character or the person of an individual.

To the Hebrews of Bible times, the name of a person (or a place) often had great significance. Rather than just to identify by outward appearance (like mine is Terry), the name meant more in relation to a persons (or an objects) character, mission or origins of existence etc. Take for example the following

“And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living.” Genesis 3:20 (Strong's says that the word Eve means life giver)

“And Adam knew his wife again; and she bare a son, and called his name Seth: For God, said she, hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew. Genesis 4:25 (Strong's says that the word Seth means substitute)

“And the angel of the LORD said unto her [Hagar], Behold, thou art with child and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael; because the LORD hath heard thy affliction.” Genesis 16:11 (Strong's says that the word Ishmael means God shall hear)

“Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.” Genesis 11:9 (Strong's says that the word Babel means confusion)

We can see from this that to the Hebrew mind, a name was very significant, so when Moses asked God what name should He say was the God that sent him, he was not simply asking for His identity (who He was) but His being (what He is). The Son then, being begotten of God, was the ongoing revelation of God to humanity. This revelation began in eternity with being begotten of God the Father and culminated with the life of Christ here on earth through the incarnation.

### **Types and kinds**

It is also interesting to note that Strong's concordance says that the Greek word *genos* has as its root the word *ginomai* which as we have seen is associated with *monogenes* (Strong's concordance says that *ginomai* means to cause to be, generate or to become etc). Now whilst *genos* has the meaning of type or kind, it always has its application in the sense of parentage or stock (origins, beginnings etc). This can be seen very clearly in the way that the word *genos* is used in Scripture. Using the King James Version as an example, this latter word is translated as



- Kind or kinds (as in of each kind) in Matthew 13:47, 17:21, Mark 9:29, 1 Corinthians 12:10 and 1 Corinthians 14:10
- Kindred in Acts 4:6. Acts 7:13 and Acts 7:19
- Countrymen in 2 Corinthians 11:26
- Offspring in Acts 17:28, Acts 17:29 and Revelation 22:16
- Stock (as in being born of) in Acts 13:26 and Philippians 3:5
- Born in Acts 18:2 and Acts 18:24
- Nation (as in belonging to) in Mark 7:26 and Galatians 1:14
- Country (as in belonging to) in Acts 4:36
- Diversities (as of tongues and languages etc) in 1 Corinthians 12:28
- Generation (as in belonging to) in 1 Peter 2:9

From these usages and translations, we can see that *genos* is always used in the sense of origins or species (types or kinds) etc.

### **Unique (the only one of its kind)**

Returning our thoughts to the way that the gospel writers used *monogenes*, we can see that this word has the obvious meaning of the one and only of its kind but also, each time it is used, it has its application in a parent-child relationship. Those therefore that insist that this word only means unique or one of its kind must take this latter realisation into account. To put it another way, those who insist that *monogenes* only means unique etc, must provide a satisfactory answer as to why this word was only used within the Scriptures of a parent-child relationship. Never did the Bible writers use *monogenes* with respect to things. It was only used with respect to parent-child relationships, which of course implies a previous begetting (acquiring).

Note importantly that a *monogenes* child must be, for whatever reason, unique or one of a kind. It cannot mean that there is two of exactly the same type (kind). This is because it is impossible to have two of anything, either things or people, and still describe each in the very same respect as being unique. To put it another way, it is impossible to have in the very same respect, two uniques. This is why the word unique can only be used as singular and not as a plural. In other words, if two people are both described as being unique (perhaps even two brothers or two sisters), it must be for two different reasons.

We need now to make the application and ask: What is it that makes the Second Person of the Godhead unique (one of a kind)? I ask this because if He is one of a kind, then how is He different from the other two persons of the Godhead? If He is considered one of a kind then in some way or another He must be different from the other two. Certainly it cannot be said, if He is the same in every respect as the Father and the Holy Spirit, that He is one of a kind. So what is it that makes the Son different than the other two?

In early Christianity, also in early Seventh-day Adventism, Christ was unique (one of a kind) because He was believed to be the only one who has been begotten (brought forth or sourced) of God. This makes Him the only begotten Son of God (God from God). We have seen this in the previous two sections. According to current Seventh-day Adventist theology, it is not because Christ is a Son that the Second person of the Godhead (as they like to call Him) is unique (one of a kind). This is because in their current theology, He is not sourced of the Father therefore He is not a Son, at least not in His pre-existence. This is why current Seventh-day Adventist theology insists that in the redemption of mankind from sin, the three persons of the Godhead resorted to role-playing (pretending to be what they were not). We shall see this in section ten.

So what is it that in current Seventh-day Adventist theology makes the Son unique (one of a kind)? This needs to be given serious consideration, especially by those who believe it. We shall come back to this point later.

### **Concerning unique**

Another point of interest here is that the word unique is not usually used to simply mean one or one and only. Let me give you an example.

If there is only one apple left in the fruit bowl, for that reason alone it is not usually said to be unique. This is not the way that the word unique is normally used. We usually only use the word unique to signify that there is something special concerning whatever it is that we are defining. If I were to say to someone that the one and only apple in the fruit bowl was unique, then it would be expected that it would be so for a far different reason than that it was the only one remaining in the bowl. On the other hand, if the only apple in the bowl happened to be the only apple that a particular tree had ever produced, then this would be different. Even if it was amongst other apples in the bowl, that particular apple could truly said to be unique. This is how it is with God and His Son. The Son is the one and only sourced (begotten) of Him. This is why, even when amongst others who are said to be sons of God, He is unique. These others are angels who are literally created by God (Job 38:6-7) and the sinner who is lovingly adopted of God (see John 1:12, Romans 8:14, Galatians 4:6, Philippians 2:15, 1 John 3:1-2 etc). We have already seen (and will see again later) that this is what has been revealed to us through the spirit of prophecy.

As another example, imagine a man who for the one and only time in his life builds a computer. It could be said that this computer is unique. In other words, it

would be the one and only computer of its type or kind meaning that there is none other like it.

Now lets reason together here. What would make this computer unique? Is it the various bits and pieces of the hardware? Is it the software loaded on the computer? No it is not. It is the fact that it is the only computer that this person has ever produced. It is one of a kind therefore it is this that constitutes its claim to uniqueness.

Current Seventh-day Adventist theology simply says that the divine being who is called a son is one of three co-equal and co-eternal persons of the Godhead, commonly referred to by them as the Second Person of the Godhead. Rightly or wrongly it is therefore assumed that this leads to the belief that all three persons of the Godhead are all exactly the same. It must be asked therefore, what would make any one of these divine personalities unique? After all, there can be no more three uniques than two uniques. To put it another way again, for one particular person of the Godhead to be regarded as unique, then there must be something different about Him from the other two. So in current Seventh-day Adventist theology, what would that uniqueness be?

For those who believe that all three persons of the Godhead are exactly the same, also that the Son is not begotten, this is a question that is seemingly very difficult to answer. This is because there always has to be a reason why something is said to be unique. Certainly the word *monogenes* does not simply mean one and only or only one (remember the one apple in the fruit bowl).

In summary and put it in a nutshell (also put in another way if you like), if the Son is the only one of His kind, then how is God the Father and the Holy Spirit different from Him? Note very importantly that the word *monogenes* is never applied to God the Father or the Holy Spirit. So why did not Jesus (or the Bible writers) say that His Father was begotten or that the Holy Spirit is begotten? Are they not also unique? In other words, why did not Christ (or the Bible writers) say my *monogenes* Father or the *monogenes* Holy Spirit?

### **An obvious meaning**

God never does anything unnecessarily. I say this because there must have been a reason why He had Luke record the story of how Jesus brought back to life the widow of Nain's son (see Luke 7:11-16). Luke records

“Now when he [Jesus] came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son [*monogenes*] of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her.” Luke 7:12

Luke could have said only son (if that is all that he wanted to say) without using the word *monogenes*. It is reasonable to assume therefore that he had a particular reason for using the word *monogenes*. This dead man was decidedly unique. This is because not only was he the only son of his mother but also by

reason that his father was dead he would be the only one that together his parents would ever produce.

There is similar reasoning to the one daughter of Jairus whom Jesus brought back to life. The Scriptures say

“For he [Jairus] had one only [*monogenes*] daughter, about twelve years of age, and she lay a dying. But as he went the people thronged him.” Luke 8:42

There is a third time that Luke uses the word *monogenes*. This is when he says of the child possessed of an evil spirit

“And, behold, a man of the company cried out, saying, Master, I beseech thee, look upon my son: for he is mine only child [*monogenes*].” Luke 9:38

The application each time *monogenes* is used is reasonably apparent. On each of the three occasions the child was one of a kind. Interesting is that apart from Luke, John is the only gospel writer to use the word *monogenes* but each time he uses it is with respect to an only child. The important thing to note is that *monogenes* is only used with respect to an only child. We shall see that now with application to Isaac.

### **The *monogenes* Isaac**

Very often, those who insist that *monogenes* should only be regarded as meaning unique (one of a kind) cite as an example of their conclusion the way that the writer of Hebrews describes Isaac. We shall look at this now, remembering again that for someone or something to be termed unique (one of its type or kind), it must be for a specific reason.

Apart from Luke and John, the only other Bible writer to use the word *monogenes* was the apostle Paul. He used it just this once in his epistle to the Hebrews. This latter use is in Hebrews 11:17. This is where the inspired record describes Isaac as the only begotten (*monogenes*) son of Abraham. Once again we see that an inspired Bible writer used *monogenes* in the respect of a parent-child relationship. Again this must be regarded as being highly significant. This is also very interesting because as the Scriptures tell us, Isaac was not Abraham's only biological son. This we know because they reveal that Abraham had one son named Ishmael born of Hagar and six other sons by one concubine named Keturah (see Genesis 25:1-4 and 1 Chronicles 1:32-33). It also appears that Abraham had other sons from various unnamed concubines (see Genesis 25:6). The apostle Paul wrote describing Isaac as *monogenes*

“By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten [*monogenes*] son Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called” Hebrews 11:17-18

So why did the author of Hebrews use this word *monogenes* to describe Isaac? It can be truly said that Isaac was the only one of a kind (type) because as far as the Sacred Record reveals, he was the only son of Abraham and Sarah. In other words, Isaac was the only son that together Abraham and Sarah ever produced. Even more important to note is that he was also the only one that was promised of God to Abraham and Sarah.

That the apostle Paul had a good command of the Greek (Koine) language cannot be disputed therefore when he used *monogenes* to describe Isaac he must have had a very good reason for doing so. Needless to say, there must have been different ways and words in the Greek language that he could have used so we must ask why he chose to use *monogenes* (remember here that Paul wrote this letter to the Hebrews decades prior to John writings in which he describes Christ as *monogenes*). So why did Paul use *monogenes*? A satisfactory answer is the realisation that this word conveyed to those whom this epistle was addressed (Hebrew Christians), God's own personal description of Isaac. This is as it is found within the Old Testament Scriptures.

We need to remember here that those to whom Paul was addressing his remarks were descendants of those who for centuries had been the recipients and custodians of these inspired writings. It was absolutely imperative therefore for Paul to express himself in such a way that was in keeping with those writings. As most Seventh-day Adventists will realise, Paul set out to show in this epistle (more of a theology really) why Christ can be truly regarded as the embodiment of the Jewish sacrificial system.

The Old Testament Scripture to which the writer of Hebrews alluded when he used *monogenes* to describe Isaac can be found in the book of Genesis. This is where it says (note the word son is in italics denoting that it is a supplied word)

“And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only *son* Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.” Genesis 22:1-2

Here we can see that God refers to Isaac as being Abraham's “only”. The Bible translators have supplied the word “*son*”. Abraham was actually told, “Take now thy son, thine only Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.”

Isaac was not Abraham's only son. Note also the words “whom thou lovest”. They are very important. We shall see why later.

In the KJV, as translated here, the Hebrew word *Yachiyd* is translated only. Note that the word son is supplied. In other words, the word ‘son’ is not in the text (see

also Genesis 22:12 and 16). Notice the same in Jeremiah 6:26, Amos 8:10 and Zechariah 12:10. There is also similar happenings (the need to supply words) in Judges 11:34, Proverbs 4:3 (see below). On the other four occasions it is translated darling (Psalm 22:20 and 35:17), desolate (Psalm 25:16) and solitary (Psalms 68:6). Notice that each time it is translated only, it is in respect of a child. Again this is very important.

Interesting to note also is that the root word of *Yachiyd* (*yachad*) is only used twice in the Scriptures. It is translated united in Genesis 49:6 and unite in Psalm 86:11. It has the meaning of *to be (or become) one*. In Proverbs 4:3, Solomon refers to himself by saying

“For I was my father's son, tender and only [*Yachiyd*] *beloved* in the sight of my mother.” Proverbs 4:3

Notice here that the word *beloved* is a supplied word. If it were not there, the impression would be that Solomon was the only son of Bathsheba or David, which he was not. Neither was it the intention of the writer's use of this word (*Yachiyd*) to even imply it. In this verse, the idea of using *Yachiyd* is not to say that Solomon was an only (single) son but the one greatly beloved. He was the darling son. This is why the word *Yachiyd* was used. He was certainly not the only biological son of David and Bathsheba. They had at least three more sons (see 2 Samuel 5:14, 1 Chronicles 3:5, 1 Chronicles 14:4)

Note the use of *Yachiyd* in Psalms 22:20. It says (note too the Hebrew parallelism – very common in the Psalms and Proverbs)

“Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling [*Yachiyd*] from the power of the dog.” Psalms 22:20

Here we can see the “soul” being thought of as the only one and therefore precious (“my darling”). See also Psalm 35:17. Another example of *Yachiyd* is in Amos 8:10

“And I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; and I will bring up sackcloth upon all loins, and baldness upon every head; and I will make it as the mourning of an only son [*Yachiyd*], and the end thereof as a bitter day.” Amos 8:10

Here we see the idea of something so precious that it would be totally irreplaceable. This is the thought behind *Yachiyd*. Again it is the one greatly beloved, the darling or only one. Note also Micah 8:10 and Zechariah 12:10.

In Genesis 21:1-2, even though Abraham had other biological sons, God speaks of Isaac as being Abraham's “only” (the beloved one, the darling). It was God's way of saying that He knew that Isaac was very special to Abraham, the one greatly beloved. This is why, when describing Isaac to the Hebrew Christians, Paul used the word *monogenes*. Obviously he did this to be in keeping with the

way that in the Old Testament Scriptures that God had described Isaac (*Yachiyd*). In other words, as far as Paul was concerned, the Greek word *monogenes* fitted the bill perfectly. Isaac was indeed, one of a kind or one of a type (unique). He was the one greatly beloved by Abraham (the darling). He was the one promised by God. Isaac was obviously very special.

Notice that God continued to describe Isaac as only (not only son). The Scriptures say (note again the word son in italics)

“And he [God] said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only *son* from me. And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son. And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovahjireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen. And the angel of the LORD called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only *son*” Genesis 22:12-16

By adding the word “son”, the Bible translators took away the real meaning and force of what God was saying regarding Isaac. God was saying the one greatly loved (the darling one) not that Isaac was an only son. Three times when referring to Isaac, God said “only”. So why did God recognize (also stress) Isaac as Abraham’s “only” and yet ignore Ishmael? Was not Ishmael also greatly beloved? The answer is that Isaac was the only son whom **God had caused to be** of Abraham and Sarah. He was also the only son of Abraham that God had promised to be. He was very special. In contrast, Ishmael was the product of the works of Abraham and Hagar. It was not God’s ordained intent that Ishmael should be born; neither had He promised that Ishmael would exist.

Ishmael was indeed a son of human devising (see Galatians 4:29 where he is described as one born of the flesh) but Isaac was God ordained to exist. To put it another way, Isaac existed because of the ordained (commanded) will of God according to His own divine purposes. Isaac therefore was very special. He was ordained (commanded) to exist. Ishmael existed by the *permission* of God.

Isaac was a son who was caused to be by God. Thus by using the word *monogenes* (only begotten, only one caused to be etc) to describe Isaac, Paul was in keeping with the way that God had described Isaac in the Old Testament Scriptures. We shall see this now. It was indeed a case of the one greatly beloved, the one promised by God.

### **Caused to be by God – a promised son**

As we have just seen, God only acknowledged the son of Abraham’s marriage to Sarah, the one whom He had ordained (promised and caused to be) to be born

of Abraham. Regarding this in *The Youth's Instructor* of June 1901 Ellen White noted

“God had promised Abraham that in his old age he should have a son, and this promise had been fulfilled. But now God says: "Take now thy son, . . . and offer him there for a burnt-offering." God left Ishmael out of the question saying, "Thine only son Isaac." (*Ellen G. White, The Youth's Instructor, 6th June 1901, 'Unquestioning Obedience'*)

Although Isaac was conceived by natural means, his conception was a miracle (the supernatural work of God). As Joshua put it when addressing the elders of Israel

“And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods.”  
Joshua 24:2

Joshua then said (these were still the words of the LORD God of Israel)

“And I took your father Abraham from the other side of the flood, and led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his seed, and gave him Isaac. And I gave unto Isaac Jacob and Esau: and I gave unto Esau mount Seir, to possess it; but Jacob and his children went down into Egypt. I sent Moses also and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt, according to that which I did among them: and afterward I brought you out. And I brought your fathers out of Egypt: and ye came unto the sea; and the Egyptians pursued after your fathers with chariots and horsemen unto the Red sea.” Joshua 24:3-6

Who is said to be doing the work here? Obviously, it is the LORD God Himself (Yahweh). Yet in saying this, God did not leave out the cooperation of humanity, which, in itself, is an integral part of the work of God in the salvation of mankind.

Through Joshua, God was expressing the fact that all of the work of which He had just spoken, including the birth of Isaac, *was His own work*. To put it another way, all of this work spoken of here was *God's own devising*. It can also be said to be the *end product of God's own promises*. This is why Isaac can be rightly called the son of promise as well as being caused to be by God (the direct result of the work of God). This I believe was the whole point of God, through the Holy Scriptures, saying

“Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also? And the LORD said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old? Is any thing too hard for the



LORD? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son." Genesis 18:11-14

In the eyes of Sarah, for her to have a child had come to the point of human impossibility. She had failed to realise that with God, all things are possible (Mark 10:27). That is why she suggested to Abraham that he and her handmaiden (Hagar) get together to produce a son. This was not God's way, neither was it His leading or His intentions. Instead it was the work of humanity (of human works or human devising). This is an apt illustration of the contrast between human works and the work of God (see Galatians 4:28-31)

**God had appointed Isaac to be brought into this world.** He also ordained that he should be born at a specific time and for a specific purpose. In this sense, this is the work of God because when Isaac was conceived, Sarah was past the age when a woman would normally produce a child (she was then in her 90s). That is why Isaac's birth can rightly be called a miracle. It was God who caused Isaac to be, even though he was conceived of natural means. Remember here that *monogenes* is said to mean the only one caused to be, also that in the case of Isaac, he is the only one caused to be by God of Abraham and Sarah.

When commentating on Abraham's faith that after Isaac was dead God could raise him back to life, Ellen White commented

"Isaac was the child of a miracle, and could not the power that gave him life restore it? Looking beyond that which was seen, Abraham grasped the divine word, "accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead." Hebrews 11:19." (Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 151 'The Test of Faith')

That Isaac was the Son of promise and that God had caused him to be (the direct result of a miracle of God), is why to properly describe him (as did God in the Old Testament Scriptures), the writer of Hebrews used the word *monogenes*. Paul must have had in mind this *God caused him to be* aspect of his birth rather than the biological (physical) nature of it, also that because he was the one sent of God he was the greatly beloved (the darling son). We are also told through the spirit of prophecy (this is very important)

"The command of God was calculated to stir the depths of his soul. "Take now thy son. Then as though to probe the heart a little deeper, he adds, "thine only son whom thou lovest." That is, the only son of promise, "and offer him as a burnt-offering." (Ellen G. White *Spiritual Gifts Volume 3* page 105 1864, see also *Spirit of Prophecy Volume 1* page 99, 1870)

We can see here that Ellen White emphasises the phrase "thine only son whom thou lovest" as meaning "the only son of promise". Repeatedly throughout her writings she referred to Isaac as being the latter. Isaac's existence was indeed the work of God. He was the son of promise, the one brought to pass by God of

Abraham and Sarah. This is why he was so greatly beloved. Needless to say without this miraculous intervention of God (a miracle), Isaac would not have been born.

The same in principle can be said of the divine Christ. He too is the Son of promise. He is the only one that has been brought to pass (caused to be) of God's own person (the express image of God Himself or as the creeds say, begotten of God, God from God, true God from true God). This signifies therefore that in this respect He is unique. He is God begotten. No other being in the entire universe can make this claim.

In other words, the Son of God is the work of God inasmuch as that He (the Son) is begotten of God (God begotten) and that if it were not for God's own will then the Son would not have an existence. It can also be said that because the Son is none other than God Himself (God begotten), then the Son exists of His own will (or the Son is the author of His own existence). To put it another way again, God (Yahweh) alone is responsible for the existence of the separate personalities of the Godhead. This was exactly the claim of Arius (see previous section)

### **Other instances of the use of *monogenes***

In attempting to understand how *monogenes* has been generally used in the past, I did ask of those who have a greater knowledge of these things than myself to help me in my enquiries. Here now are some other instances, sent to me during these enquiries, where *monogenes* is used in both Scripture and external writings. I am sure you will find them very interesting.

Most Christians would know the story of Jephthah and how he dedicated his one and only daughter to God. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament it says

“kai. h=lqen lefqae eivj Masshfa eivj to.n oi=kon auvtou/ kai. ivdou. h` quga,thr auvtou/ evxeporeu,eto eivj u`pa,nthsin evn tumpa,noij kai. coroi/j kai. h=n au[th monogenh,j ouvkh=n auvtw/| e[teroj ui`o.j h' quga,thr” Judges 11:34

Translated it says

“And Jephthae came to Masepha to his house; and behold, his daughter came forth to meet him with timbrels and dances; and she was his only child, he had not another son or daughter.” Judges 11:34

Here we can see the *monogenes* translated “only child”. Another example is in Psalm 25:16. It says

“evpi,bleyon evpV evme. kai. evle,hso,n me o[ti monogenh,j kai. ptwco,j eivmi evgw,” Psalm 25:16

Translated it says

“Look upon me, and have mercy upon me; for I am an only child and poor.  
Psalm 25:16

Interesting is that the KJV translated this verse as

“Turn thee unto me, and have mercy upon me; for I am desolate and afflicted.”  
Psalms 25:16

Note here that the word translated “desolate” is from the Hebrew *Yachiyd* which as we noted above means only one and is applied to a child who is the darling or the one greatly beloved etc. We also noted that the root word of *Yachiyd* (*yachad*) meaning “to be (or become) one” is only used twice. It is translated united in Genesis 49:6 and unite in Psalm 86:11. When it was translated into Greek the word *monogenes* was used. This shows that it was the equivalent of the Hebrew *Yachiyd*.

Leaving the evidence of Scriptures for the moment we turn to the witness of external writings. First we shall take a look at what Josephus wrote in his monumental work *Antiquities of the Jews*. Josephus, a Jew, was born around AD 37, which was 6 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. In the AD 60s, during the first of the wars with the Romans, he was a leader in the Jewish army. This was when the Jews revolted against Rome. This eventually led to the siege of Jerusalem, also of the total destruction of the Jewish sanctuary (AD 70). Regarding the history of this time period, the writings of Josephus are invaluable. This is especially so because it is the time period of the beginnings of Christianity.

Many consider Josephus a traitor. It appears he reneged on a suicide pact that he had made with certain survivors when the Roman armies routed the garrison at the Jewish community at Yodfat. He later collaborated with the Roman authorities. In AD 67 he surrendered himself to the Roman authorities but was released in AD 69. He later became a Roman citizen.

The major works of Josephus, originally written in Greek, are, *The Jewish War*, which he completed around AD 75 and *Antiquities of the Jews*, finished around AD 94. The latter was coming up to the time when John was to write his gospel, also his letters and the Book of Revelation. The former work of Josephus concerned the revolt of the Jews, which resulted in the wars between the Jews and the Romans, whilst the latter was a history of the Jewish people. It is this latter history that we refer to here. Included below each quote in English is the Greek rendering. Note the use each time of *monogenes*.

In Book One of his *Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus made reference to the story of Abraham and Isaac. He wrote

“Now Abraham greatly loved Isaac, as being his only begotten, and given to him in his old age, by the favour of God. The child also endeared himself to

his parents still more, by the exercise of every virtue, and adhering to his duty to his parents, and being zealous in the worship of God.” (*Antiquities of the Jews, Book 1 chapter 3*)

“Isakon de. o` path.r {Abramoj u`perhga,pa monogenh/ o;nta kai. evpi. gh,rwj ouvdw/| kata. dwrea.n auvtw/| tou/ qeou/ geno,menon proekalei/to de. eivj eu;noian kai. to. filei/sqai ma/llon u`po. tw/n gone,wn kai. auvtou.j o` pai/j evpithdeu,wn pa/san avreth.n kai. th/j te tw/n pate,rwn qerapei,aj evco,menoj kai. peri. th.n tou/ qeou/ qrhskei,an evspoudakw,j” (*Antiquities of the Jews, Book 1 chapter 3*)

In Book Two, Josephus wrote (note the reference to Dan)

“and this was the legitimate posterity of Jacob. He had, besides, by Bilhah, the handmaid of Rachel, Dan and Naphtali; which last had four sons that followed him -- Jahzeel, Guni, Jezer, and Shillem. Dan had an only begotten son, Hushim.” (*Ibid, Book 2, chapter 7*)

“kai. to. me.n gnh,sion ge,noj tw/| Vlkw,bw| tou/to h=n evk Ba,llaj de. auvtw/| gi,nontai th/j ~Rach,laj qerapaini,doj Da,noj kai. Nefqali,j w-| te,ssarej ei[ponto pai/dej VElih/loj Gou/nij Sa,rhj te kai. Se,llimoj Da,nw| de. monogene.j h=n paidi,on Ou=sij” (*Ibid, Book 2, chapter 7*)

In Book Five, Josephus refers to the story of Jephthah (as we have done so previously – see above)

“But as he [Jephthah] came back, he fell into a calamity no way correspondent to the great actions he had done; for it was his daughter that came to meet him; she was also an only child and a virgin: upon this Jephthah heavily lamented the greatness of his affliction, and blamed his daughter for being so forward in meeting him, for he had vowed to sacrifice her to God.” (*Ibid, Book 5, chapter 8*)

“avnastre,fwn de. sumfora/| peripi,ptei katV ouvde.n o`moi,a| toi/j katwrqwme,noij auvtw/| u`ph,nthse ga.r h` quga,thr auvtw/| monogenh.j dV h=n e;ti parqe,noj o` de. avnoimw,xaj evpi. tw/| mege,qei tou/ pa,qouj kateme,mfeto th/j peri. th.n u`pa,nthsin spoudh/j th.n qugate,ra kaqierw/sai ga.r auvth.n tw/| qew/| (*Ibid, Book 2, chapter 7*)

In the last book (Book Twenty, Josephus wrote about Monobazus (the king of Adiabene) and Helena his wife (also his sister) who was a convert to Judaism. After making reference to their second son Izates (the first son was named after the father Monobazus), he wrote

“He had indeed Monobazus, his older brother, by Helena also, as he had other sons by other wives besides. Yet did he openly place all his affections on this his only begotten son Izates,” (*Ibid, Book 20, chapter 2*)

“h=n de. auvtw/| Mono,bazoj tou,tou presbu,teroj evk th/j ~Ele,nhj geno,menoj a;lloi te pai/dej evx e`te,rwn gunaikw/n th.n me,ntoi pa/san eu;noian w`j eivj monogenh/ to.n Vlza,thn e;cwn fanero.j h=n” (*Ibid, Book 20, chapter 2*)

There are also two examples from the Apocrypha that are worth noting.

“and that I never polluted my name, nor the name of my father, in the land of my captivity: I am the only daughter of my father, neither hath he any child to be his heir, neither any near kinsman, nor any son of his alive, to whom I may keep myself for a wife: my seven husbands are already dead; and why should I live? but if it please not thee that I should die, command some regard to be had of me, and pity taken of me, that I hear no more reproach.” Tobit 3:15

“kai. ouvkw evmo,luna to. o;noma, mou ouvde. to. o;noma tou/ patro,j mou evn th/| gh/| th/j aivcmalwsi,aj mou monogenh,j eivmi tw/| patri, mou kai. ouvkw u`pa,rcei auvtw/| paidi,on o] klhronomh,sei auvto,n ouvde. avdelfo.j evggju.j ouvde. u`pa,rwcn auvtw/| ui`o,j i[na sunthrh,sw evmauth.n auvtw/| gunai/ka h;dh avpw,lonto, moi e`pta, i[na ti, moi zh/n kai. eiv mh. dokei/ soi avpoktei/nai, me evpi,taxon evpible,yai evpV evme. kai. evleh/sai, me kai. mhke,ti avkou/sai, me ovneidismo,n” Tobit 3:15

Three chapters later it said

“the angel said to the young man, Brother, to day we shall lodge with Raguel, who is thy cousin; he also hath one only daughter, named Sara” Tobit 6:11

“ei=pen o` a;ggeloi tw/| paidari,w| a;delfe sh,meron avvlisqhso,meqa para. Ragouhl kai. auvto.j suggenh,j sou, evstin kai. e;stin auvtw/| quga,thr monogenh.j ovno,mati Sarra” Tobit 6:11

As can be seen throughout these examples, the word *monogenes* was used with application to an only child (son or daughter)

### **A beloved Son**

I would not like to leave you the reader with the idea that John used the word *monogenes* to mean only that Christ was God’s beloved Son. There must have been more to his use of the word than that understanding. If John had just wanted to just say beloved Son he would have used the Greek word *agapetos* (from *agapao* meaning love) but he did not. Allow me to explain.

At the baptism of Jesus the voice of the Father was heard saying concerning Jesus, “Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (see Mark 1:11). Both Luke (3:22) and Matthew (3:17) also say “beloved Son”. In each of the three cases, the word “beloved” is from the Greek *agapetos*. We can see therefore if Jesus had just wanted to convey the idea that He was God’s only beloved Son He needed not have said *monogenes*. The same can be said of the

way that John described Jesus (John 1:14, 1:18, 1 John 4:9).

Whilst we do not know exactly what word Jesus would have used to Nicodemus (they were probably speaking to each other in Aramaic), it is interesting to note that the Peshitta has *yichidaya* which corresponds to *yachid* in Hebrew. This as we have seen above means the solitary one, the desolate, the one greatly beloved.

## Summary

In summary it can only be said that biblically, the word *monogenes* is used to convey the thought that a child exists therefore he or she has come to pass (past tense - has happened). Its intent of meaning cannot simply be to say unique or one and only etc as some suggest, although having said that it must be said that it does strongly contain those nuances. In other words, for a child to be said to be *monogenes*, then he or she must be in some respect the only one its kind, also someone very special, therefore to say that the word *monogenes* does not contain the idea of begotten is not a reasonable conclusion. Whilst the word itself does not convey the actual act of begetting, for it to have any meaning of application, it must be that the child has already been brought to pass otherwise it has no application.

In fact if we applied this *monogenes* literally as used in the Scriptures, we would say that this *specialness (uniqueness)* is that the child in question is without equal (the only one of its kind ever produced - like Isaac was of Abraham and Sarah). This is why it must also convey the idea of greatly beloved or darling one etc. *Monogenes* is never applied to either the Father or the Holy Spirit. It only has application to the Son. He is the only one of the three who is said to be begotten (one of a kind, greatly beloved, the darling one). In that respect He has no equal.

As we have seen in the previous two sections, this same begotten aspect is also that which the Greek speaking early church fathers recognised as being the relationship between the Father and the Son. They obviously derived their understanding of this concept from the Scriptures (more than likely from John's gospel and his personal witness) and of the witness of the apostles.

The current theology of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, as it is portrayed in their most recent literature, says that the pre-existent Christ is not begotten therefore He is not the literal Son of God. To put this in another way again, Seventh-day Adventist theologians say today that like the Father, the Son is unbegotten. What therefore would make the Son unique?

There is another question that needs to be asked here. If Christ is not really the Son of God then why throughout the Scriptures does God call Him His son? Is God the author of confusion? In other words, why tell us one thing and mean something else? Is not this tantamount to lying and deceit? Certainly it would be confusion.

My belief is that when God says that He has a Son He really does mean that He has a Son. We can also believe that when Jesus said that God had sent His only Son into the world (John 3:16) He really meant it. He did not say, as some say, that the Father had sent Him into the world to become a son (these are those who teach that He was a son from the incarnation). Nicodemus would have had no difficulty in understanding what Jesus had told him. Jesus did not say to Nicodemus that God has sent a unique one into the world to die. There was far more to what Jesus said. Jesus told him that God had sent His one and only Son. As John the gospel writer also said

“That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.” 1 John 1:3

“Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.” 1 John 2:22

Whilst we may not understand all that there is to know about the process by which the Son became, we can understand enough to know that God loved this world so much that to pay the price of sin, He gave His only beloved Son to humanity.

We have seen from above the real meaning of *monogenes*. It is that in the Scriptures it is only ever applied to an only child. All that leaves us to do is to ask whether in the case of Christ it should be taken literally, or should it be taken to be metaphorical. This is the thought that we need to keep in mind as we continue our studies. In section six we shall see that there is no reason why we should not believe it to have a literal application.

## **The Begotten Series**

### **Section five**

#### **God begotten**

This is part 2 of the *Begotten Theology* sections in this *Begotten Series*. In the previous section we dealt with the Greek word *monogenes*. In this section we

shall see that to say that in His pre-existence that Christ is a begotten Son is saying that He is God Himself begotten. We shall do this by first looking at a Bible text that says this precisely. This is John 1:18.

### **John 1:18**

In the Seventh-day Adventist Bible commentary, there is a comment on John 1:18 that I would like to share with you. The verse in question says

“No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him”. John 1:18

John is saying that at the time he wrote his gospel, which was over 60 years after the ascension of Christ (very near the end of the 1st century), the Son was “in the bosom of His Father”. This is an interesting insight because as we shall see later, Ellen White spoke of the Son of God, prior to His coming to earth, as being torn from the bosom of the Father. The comment made in the Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia in reference to this verse says

“Textual evidence is divided (cf. p. 146) between the readings “Son” and “God”. Either way would be reference to Christ. If the reading “God” is accepted, the sense would then be: “the unique one, very God, the one abiding in the bosom of the Father,” or the only one (who is) God, the one who abides in the bosom of the Father” (*Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, Vol. 5 page 905, 1966 edition*)

Here it is being said that some extant manuscripts say “Son” (only begotten Son) whilst others say “God” (only begotten God). This brings us to a very interesting conclusion. This conclusion is that this verse could easily read “No man hath seen God at any time, God the only begotten which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him”. Thus we could have the terminology, God begotten (not a begotten god or a lesser god but God Himself begotten).

Here I believe is the mystery of Godliness, God manifest in the flesh. The Son of God is God Himself (the one and only God) begotten but is also a separate personality from God (the Father). This is exactly as the New International Version puts this verse.

“No-one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known” John 1:18 New International Version.

This is in complete harmony with the opening words of John’s gospel that says

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.” John 1:1-2

The Scriptures tell us that the Word that eventually became flesh (see John 1:14) was not only with God but was, in His pre-existence and in the highest



sense, God. In the book *The Trinity*, Woodrow Whidden makes this observation. After saying that John 1:18 was one of the more overlooked texts of John's writings he says

"The reason that it often gets overlooked results from the fact that, along with the King James Version and many other earlier versions, the verse reads as follows " No one has seen God at anytime. The only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (NKJV) (*Woodrow Whidden, 'The Trinity', page 54, The full and eternal deity of Christ'*)

He continues

"The expression "the only begotten Son" is, however, replaced in most contemporary English versions with either "the only begotten God" (NASB) or "God the one and only" (NIV). The reason for this more striking testimony to the deity of Christ is that the most reliable and ancient Greek manuscripts of the New Testament have the reading *monogenes theos* ("only begotten God" or "one and only God," or "unique God) in place of *monogenes huiois* ("only begotten Son" or "one and only Son" or "unique Son". (*Ibid*)

The thought that Whidden is conveying here is that the more reliable manuscripts, also the most ancient, render John 1:18 as saying *monogenes theos* (God) instead of *monogenes huiois* (son) which in turn lends itself to the understanding that the Son is complete deity. Some may object to the expression begotten God because it makes it look as though the one who is begotten is a different God from the One whom He was begotten but this fear is dispelled when it is reasoned that it is God Himself who is begotten (God begotten). Whidden concludes

"If the witness of the most reliable Greek manuscripts support the term *theos* ("God"), rather than *huios* ("Son"), what we have here is one of the few direct, uncontested applications of the term "God" to Jesus in the New Testament (such as John 1:1, Phil.2:6, and Heb. 1:8). (*Ibid*)

Interesting to note here is that Whidden says that these "most reliable Greek manuscripts" use the word *monogenes*, which historically has been translated as only begotten. This means to an extent that the crux of the problem here revolves around the word *monogenes*. As this has been dealt with in the previous section we will not comment further here.

That the Son of God is God was something that was eloquently expressed by Uriah Smith. He was one of the long time pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism. We shall also see later that what he said was also once the faith of Seventh-day Adventists. At least it was whilst Ellen White was alive. Smith wrote (this was when the faith of Seventh-day Adventists was still a non-trinitarian faith)

"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.” (*Uriah Smith, Looking unto Jesus, page 10, chapter 2, ‘Christ as Creator’ 1898*)

Smith is saying that the Son of God is God Himself begotten (“the evolution of deity”). This was in keeping with what was then, in 1898, the faith of Seventh-day Adventists. Note he says that this evolution that ceased was “as deity”. Smith obviously had in mind that the Son had later become flesh.

### **Christ Begotten - thoughts from the Spirit of Prophecy**

In the Scriptures, the word *monogenes* is always (and only) used in connection with literal offspring (literal sons and daughters). We noted this in the previous section. In the case of the Son of God, there is no reason to believe that this is any different, even when referring to His pre-existence. Nevertheless, when applied to the Son of God, we must not think of this begetting as we would in human terms. How and when this begetting was achieved we have not been told. None of us, in human terms, can explain eternity. What we have been told though, through the spirit of prophecy, is that

“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 ‘Christ Our Complete Salvation’*)

We should note first of all that by saying “only-begotten Son”, Ellen White is using this expression as an adjective (a description of the Son) but the second time she uses begotten is in the sense of **why** Christ is said to be the Son of God. In the latter usage she said that He is a Son **because** He is begotten. This is the all-important part of what she is saying. This is an act of God. This is the very stress that she is making. If this is missed then the whole point of her making this statement is missed. In other words, if this point is missed, then she may as well not have bothered to make the statement. As we noted in section three, Hilary of Poitiers said much the same. That was in the 4th century.

Here in this statement, the word begotten is used in the sense that this was something that had happened (come to pass or caused to be). Ellen White was using this word (the second time she used it) as a verb, a doing (action) word. There is no way that it can be said that here she is using this word as in an adjective (a describing word) in the sense of unique or one and only etc. Read the statement again and you will see what I mean. This use of the English

language here is not open to misinterpretation. In other words, her meaning here cannot be and must not be misconstrued.

It can clearly be seen that Ellen White contrasts Christ a begotten Son with the idea of a son by creation (an action) or adoption (an action), thus we can also see very clearly that she uses the term begotten in the sense of an acquiring which has come to pass causing to be etc (an action). In other words, God acquired a son by the process we generally term a begetting, meaning causing Him to be. Certainly Ellen White here used begotten in the sense of a verb (an action or doing word).

According to Ellen White, there was no question regarding the pre-existent Christ not being begotten or that He was not literally a son. Note particularly this next statement that came from her pen. It came 6 weeks after her previous begotten statement.

“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’*)

Here it I said that the Eternal Father is unchangeable. Secondly note that instead of saying that the Son of God was begotten in the express image of His Father’s person (as in her previous statement), she actually says that He “was made in the express image of his person”. Here the two words “begotten” and “made” are being used synonymously. Thirdly, note that this was in the Son’s pre-existence, meaning that was prior to when God “sent Him down to earth”. In other words, she was not using “made” with reference to the incarnation or resurrection of Christ but to the source of the eternal being of the Son. Note that she made these statements after having had 50 years of revelation from God (1844-1895).

Fourthly, and perhaps the very height of importance regarding the intimate relationship between the Father and the Son, Ellen White says that in order to send Him to earth, the Father “tore from his bosom Him who was made in the express image of his person.” Again and again from the Scriptures, also from the pen of Ellen White, it can be clearly seen that the Son is separate person from the Father and that by some means not revealed (the actual mechanics of it) He came out of the Father, or, as the early church fathers put it, was generated of the Father (see section two and section three). This was obviously the best word that they could find to describe this happening.

Ellen White clearly says that the Father is the source of the Son’s being. In fact she said in the *Review and Herald* in 1890

“The world’s Redeemer was equal with God. His authority was as the authority of God. He declared that he had no existence separate from the

Father. The authority by which he spoke, and wrought miracles, was expressly his own, yet he assures us that he and the Father are one." (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald 7th Jan 1890, 'Christ revealed the Father'*)

In His own right, God is a personality. He is the Father. We are also told that Christ is "equal" to Him therefore He is a separate personality from the Father. Ellen White also makes it unmistakably clear that the Son has "no existence separate from the Father". This is totally in keeping with the begotten concept of Christ.

### **In the form (morphe) of God**

Another interesting passage of Scripture is where the apostle Paul said to the believers in Philippi

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Philippians 2:5-8

I would draw your attention first to where Paul says that Christ, in His pre-existence, thought it not robbery to be "equal with God". If Paul had wanted to say that Christ had been God Himself in personality he would have said it but this is something that he did not do. If he had done so he would have caused confusion between the Father and the Son. As did Ellen White repeatedly (and was very careful to do), he differentiated between God (the Father) and Christ (the Son). It is also interesting to note the use of the definite article (also the non-use of it) in John 1:1. It says in the KJV

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

By the use of the article and the exclusion of it, this text would read

"In beginning was the Word, and the Word was with **the God**, and the Word was God."

John, as did Paul (see above), was differentiating between God (the Father) and the Word (the Son of God). This is why he included the article and said literally, "the God". This was with reference to the Father. As was said in section one, it was not "the God" (the Father) that became flesh but the Son of the God.

Referring back to Paul's remarks to the Philippians: whilst much could be said concerning of what it was that the Son of God emptied Himself to become like us (which is really what this passage actually concerns), suffice to say that Christ is again spoken of as being separate from God. Note also that God is spoken of

here as supreme deity (the infinite God). What I mean by that is that Christ (in His pre-existence) is said to have been “equal with God”. For an understanding of what the Son gave up in becoming human see section seventeen and section eighteen of the detailed history series here

### [A Detailed History of the Trinity Doctrine](#)

Paul does not say that God was equal with Christ making the Son the supreme deity (the infinite God). It is the Father (the infinite God) not the Son who is the source of all things. It was God the Father that did the giving and the Son that did the receiving. The Son received also that He could give. As Ellen White put it in *The Desire of Ages* (this was after saying that the angels find their joy in giving)

“But turning from all lesser representations, we behold God in Jesus. Looking unto Jesus we see that it is the glory of our God to give. "I do nothing of Myself," said Christ; "the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father." "I seek not Mine own glory," but the glory of Him that sent Me. John 8:28; 6:57; 8:50; 7:18.” (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, page 21, ‘God with us’*)

She then added

“In these words is set forth the great principle which is the law of life for the universe. All things Christ received from God, but He took to give. So in the heavenly courts, in His ministry for all created beings: through the beloved Son, the Father's life flows out to all; through the Son it returns, in praise and joyous service, a tide of love, to the great Source of all. And thus through Christ the circuit of beneficence is complete, representing the character of the great Giver, the law of life.” (*Ibid*)

Returning our thoughts to Philippians 2:5-8 (see above), notice something else very interesting. This is that the word translated here “form” in both verse 6 and verse 7 is from the Greek word *morphe*. I say interesting because from various writings outside of the Scriptures, we learn that the Greeks used this word when referring to change in their God's. This was not a change to their inner being (structure) but to their outward appearance. Thus the very same God would be in a different form (*morphe*).

The meaning of *Morphe* can also be seen in such words as metamorphous, metamorphosis and metamorphic. All of these latter words are to do with change or transformation. This can also be seen in the Greek god *Morpheus* who had the ability to take any human's form, also to appear in dreams etc. In computer language today we use the word morphing to denote the transformation of one image into another. However, as far as God is concerned, this different form as in the evolution of deity, the inner being (the person of God Himself) was unchanged. This was the same as it always had been. Jesus was the person of

God manifest in the flesh. We now need to take a look at what we mean by person.

### **The person of God**

In Hebrews 1:3, the Greek word that is here translated person is the Greek word *hupostasis*. This is completely different than the Greek word *prosopon* that Paul could have used which means the countenance or appearance (i.e. that which is visibly seen, the visage). As a matter of interest, this latter word *prosopon* is often translated in the KJV as face faces, or countenance etc., thus depicting outward appearance. We can see therefore that in His opening remarks to the Hebrew Christians, the writer avoided using either *eikon* or *prosopon*, both of which are normally used with reference to outward appearance.

By using the word *hupostasis*, Paul is not expressing the idea that the Son was the same as the Father in outward looks but that He was one and the same in inward appearance meaning the very same in His person (inner person or inner being). In what I believe was her most comprehensive statement on the Godhead (this was when there was a crisis within Seventh-day Adventism regarding Godhead theology), Ellen White wrote

“The Son is all the fullness 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.” (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Series B No.7 page 62 1906 ‘Come out and be Separate’*)

In other words, the Son is the very person (inner person or inner being) of God shown. As a matter of passing interest here, Ellen White does say that the Father and Son are not identical. To the Seventh-day Adventist youth at the time she was preparing *The Desire of Ages* she said

“As the disciples comprehended it, as their perception took hold of God's divine compassion, they realized that there is a sense in which the sufferings of the Son were the sufferings of the Father. From eternity there was a complete unity between the Father and the Son. They were two, yet little short of being identical; two in individuality, yet one in spirit, and heart, and character.” (*Ellen G. White, The Youth's Instructor 16th December 1897 ‘The New Commandment part 1’*)

We can see again from this that Ellen White clearly says that the Father and Son are two separate individuals. She also says that they are “**little short of being identical**”. In other words, the Father and Son are almost the same but not quite (not exactly the same). This was much the same as we noted was said by Alexander of Alexandria (see section one). It is this difference that makes the Son unique. This is that He is the only one begotten of God.

Returning our thoughts to the book of Hebrews, three times the writer uses the word *hupostasis*. First in Hebrews 1:3 where it is translated *person*, secondly in Hebrews 3:14 where it is translated *confidence* and thirdly in Hebrews 11:3 where it is translated *substance*. All three instances are as in the KJV. The same writer also used it in 2 Corinthians 9:4 and 2 Corinthians 11:17. This is where it is translated as confident and confidence (KJV).

The word *hupostasis* is a compound of two other Greek words. These words are *hupo* meaning literally under (for its usage see such as Matthew 5:15, Luke 13:34, Acts 2:5 and Romans 16:20 etc) and *histemi* (a primary verb) meaning *to be stood* (stand or standing) or be *established* (for its usage see Matthew 2:9 [stood], 6:5 [standing], 18:16 [established], Mark 9:36 [set], John 1:26 [standeth] and Acts 24:21 [standing] etc).

We can see then that the word *hupostasis* means that which is the foundation or under-girding (sub-structure or substance) of cause of being. It also means the essential structure of what something is (what makes something what it is). We can see this more clearly as we study how the author of Hebrews used this same word in Hebrews 3:14

“For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence [Gr. *Hupostasis*] stedfast unto the end” Hebrews 3:14

This “confidence” is the substance of our hope (it is that of which our hope is made, the foundation or under-girding). As Paul explains as he uses this Greek word for the third time

“Now faith is the substance [Gr. *Hupostasis*] of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Hebrews 11:1

The substance/confidence (Gr. *hupostasis*) is the stuff of which are hopes are made. It is our faith, the foundation or under-girding of our hopes.

Paul uses this very same Greek word when he said that the Son is the “express image (Gr. *charakter*) of His (God’s) person” (Gr. *hupostasis*) (see Hebrews 1:3). This stuff (substance/foundation/under-girding) then of which Paul says that Christ consists, is God’s person. It is the very essence of God (who and what God is).

It is very interesting to note that William Tyndale translated Hebrews 1:3 as saying (as did Miles Coverdale when he produced his translation of the complete Bible after Tyndale was martyred for his faith)

“Which sonne beyng the brightnes of his glory and very ymage of his substance bearinge vp all thinges with the worde of his power hath in his awne person poured oure synnes and is sitten on the right honde of the maiestie an hye” Hebrews 1:3 Tyndale’s translation

This would say to us today in modern English

“Which son being the brightness of his glory and very image of his [God’s] substance bearing up all things with the word of his power hath in his own person purged our sins and is sitting on the right hand of the majesty on high”

Notice here that Tyndale says that the Son is the “[very image of his \[God’s\] substance](#)” whereas the KJV says, “[express image of his \(God’s\) person](#)”. Notice also that Tyndale emphasises that the Son purged our sins in “[his own person](#)” (Gr. *heautou* meaning himself) thus ensuring that the Son is seen as a separate person from God the Father and the one who did the purging in Himself.

Tyndale’s translation is much better than the KJV. It shows exactly what Paul meant by his use of *hupostasis*. Seeing that the translators of the KJV relied heavily on Tyndale’s version, one is left to wonder why they did not use his translation here. They confused the issue whilst Tyndale made it very clear. Tyndale is saying that what God is, so is the Son.

### **The Word (the Son) is everything that God is**

By using the words *substance* and *person*, Tyndale was attempting (and I believe succeeded), in showing that the Greek conveys that the Son was a manifestation, as a separate personality from God, of the very being of God (who and what God is). The translators of the KJV did not accomplish this when they translated it as saying of the Son

“Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high:” Hebrews 1:3.

The expression here used (“[express image of His person](#)”) could quite easily be taken to mean an exact copy of God in outward appearance. By his use of Greek words, the author of Hebrews did not mean to convey that latter thought. To put it another way, the understanding of this verse as it is written in the KJV would totally depend on the reader’s conception of the word *person* although the KJV rendering would be more than acceptable to trinitarians. This is because it does tie in quite well with their trinity formula. It is quite possible therefore that the KJV translators translated this verse with a trinitarian bias. In other words by saying “[very image of his \[God’s\] substance](#)”, Tyndale captured successfully the original thought whilst the translators of the KJV confused (clouded) the issue. In Hebrews 1:3, Paul was setting out to convey, as we would say today and as was said by Ellen White, that the Son is the very “[personality \(substance\) of God made manifest](#)” (see above).

John Wycliffe, in his translation of the Scriptures (this was the first complete



Bible in any European language which effectively means that it was the first complete Bible in English) says

“Which whanne also he is the brytnesse of glorie, and figure of his substaunce, and berith alle thingis bi word of his vertu, he makith purgacioun of synnes, and syttith on the riythalf of the maieste in heuenes Hebrews 1:3 Wycliffe translation (1395 edition)

As can be seen, even though it is in 14th century English, Wycliffe says, as did Tyndale later, that the Son is a “figure of his [God’s] substance”. This shows, (as did Tyndale successfully) that the Son is a separate person from God yet an exact image of His substance (inner person/inner being). Even the New World Translation of the Scriptures published by the Watchtower Society of the Jehovah’s Witnesses (who do not even believe that the Son is God Himself) says that He is an exact representation of God’s very being. Hebrews 1:3 says in this particular translation

“He is the reflection of [his] glory and the exact representation of his very being, and he sustains all things by the word of his power; and after he had made a purification for our sins he sat down on the right hand of the Majesty in lofty places” Hebrews 1:3 New World Translation

The Jehovah’s Witness translation of this verse is in perfect accord with the Greek (“the exact representation of his very being”) although we must hasten to add that as a denomination they do not regard the Son as Yahweh but as a creature created by Him. There can be no compromise between these two beliefs. The study you are now reading accepts only that the Son is Yahweh Himself, whilst Jehovah’s Witnesses say that Yahweh created the Son. These two views are diametrically opposed to each other.

It is also very interesting to note that the Presbyterian minister Daniel Mace, in his 18th century translation of the New Testament translated directly from the Greek, says of the Son in Hebrews 1:3

“Who being the radiation of his glory, and the imprest image of his [God’s] substance, and governing all things by his powerful command, after having himself made expiation for our sins, sat down on the right hand of the divine majesty in the highest heavens.” Hebrews 1:3 Mace translation (1729)

Notice here that Mace, although highly criticised by many scholars for his translation having a Unitarian bias, (amongst other things Unitarians are non-trinitarians) says that the Son was the “imprest image of his [God’s] substance”. The word *imprest* is very interesting. In its archaic sense it is a past tense and a past participle of the word *impress* which dictionary definitions include the meaning *to press or stamp, or print something in or upon; to imprint* (that which bears the impression), *to stamp an image upon* etc. Here we can see then that Mace says that the Son was the *very imprest* (impression) of God.

Interesting is the way that this is explained in *The Abingdon Bible Commentary* of 1929, compiled by some 66 professors of biblical exegesis, biblical languages, theology, Christian doctrine and church history etc. With reference to the words express image (KJV) it says

“The word translated ‘very image’ means, literally, the stamp cut by a die, and so the impress made upon a seal; thus the phrase signifies that the essence of the divine nature was stamped on the Person of Christ. He was the impress of God’s essence” (*Professor H. T. Andrews, D.D., ‘The Abingdon Bible Commentary’, 1929*)

Note the words “the essence of the divine nature was stamped on the Person of Christ”. This “nature” is with obvious reference to the inner person (substance) of God.

Very interesting to note here is that in a letter addressed to Alexander Bishop of Constantinople, Alexander the Bishop of Alexandria said with reference to the words of Jesus “I and my Father are one” (this is from the same letter in which we noted in section one that Alexander said that those who believe the Son to be unbegotten have their intellects blinded)

“In these words [I and my Father are one] the Lord does not proclaim Himself to be the Father, neither does He represent two natures as one; but that the essence of the Son of the Father preserves accurately the likeness of the Father, His nature taking off the impress of likeness to Him in all things, being the exact image of the Father and the express stamp of the prototype.” (*Letter, Alexander of Alexandria to Alexander of Constantinople, Theodoret’s history, Book 1 chapter 3*)

This is exactly as was said in the various Bible translations we have just read.

Note the wording “impress of likeness” to God’s nature. Alexander said that the “essence of the Son” “preserves accurately the likeness of the Father”. Note too he says that the Son is “the express stamp of the prototype”, meaning an exact replica of the original. Alexander then added

“When, therefore, Philip, desirous of seeing the Father, said to Him, ‘*Lord, show us the Father,*’ the Lord with abundant plainness said to him, ‘ ,’ as though the Father were beheld in the spotless and living mirror of His image. The same idea is conveyed in the Psalms, where the saints say, ‘*In Thy light we shall see light.*’ It is on this account that ‘*he who honoureth the Son, honoureth the Father.*’ And rightly, for every impious word which men dare to utter against the Son is spoken also against the Father.” (*Ibid*)

In other words, as we have already seen that Ellen White says

“The Son is all the fullness of the Godhead manifested. The Word of God declares Him to be “the express image of His person.” ....Here is shown the personality of the Father.” (see above)

There is only one place in Ellen White’s writings where I have found that she said specifically that the Father and the Son were of the same substance. This was also with reference (as did Alexander) to the time that Jesus said, “I and my Father are one”.

“With what firmness and power he uttered these words. The Jews had never before heard such words from human lips, and a convicting influence attended them; for it seemed that divinity flashed through humanity as Jesus said, “I and my Father are one.” The words of Christ were full of deep meaning as he put forth the claim that he and the Father were of one substance, possessing the same attributes. The Jews understood his meaning, there was no reason why they should misunderstand, and they took up stones to stone him. Jesus looked upon them calmly and unshrinkingly, and said, “Many good works have I showed you from my Father; for which of these works do ye stone me?” (Ellen G. White *Signs of the Times* 20th November 1893, ‘*The True Sheep Respond to the Voice of the Shepherd*’)

Notice here that Ellen White made it clear that when Jesus said that He and His Father were one, He was referring to one in “attributes”. We were also told in 1898 (which was the same year that *The Desire of Ages* was published)

“In Christ is gathered all the glory of the Father. In Him is all the fulness of the Godhead. He is the brightness of the Father’s glory and the express image of His person. The glory of the attributes of God are expressed in His character.” (Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times* 24th November 1898 ‘*The Great Salvation*’, see also *Christ’s Object Lessons* page 115 ‘*The Pearl*’ 1900)

Here we can see that Ellen White says that the attributes of God are expressed in the “character” of the Son thus it was in His divine nature that He was the express image of God. As Ellen White also wrote in 1887 with reference to Philippians 2:5-8

“The apostle would call our attention from ourselves to the Author of our salvation. He presents before us his two natures, divine and human. Here is the description of the divine: “Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God.” He was “the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person.”

Now, of the human: “He was made in the likeness of man: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death.” (Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald* 5th July 1887 ‘*Christ Man’s Example*, see also *Review and Herald* 4th September 1900’)

Here we can see confirmation that the Son of God, in His divine nature (in His pre-existence), was the express image of God's person (inner being/substance).

### **The Son not the Father but the express image**

The Son of God must never be confused with God the Father. In the 5th Volume of the Testimonies to the church, Ellen White penned these words

"When Philip came to Jesus with the request, "Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us," the Saviour answered him: "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip? he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?" Christ declares Himself to be sent into the world as a representative of the Father. In His nobility of character, in His mercy and tender pity, in His love and goodness, He stands before us as the embodiment of divine perfection, the image of the invisible God. (*Ellen G. White, 5th Volume Testimonies, page 739, 'The character of God revealed in Christ'*)

This "invisible God" is the Father. Christ said Ellen White, in harmony with the Scriptures, is the "image" of Him. In *The Desire of Ages* Ellen White wrote (again this was with respect to Philip asking Jesus to show the disciples the Father)

"Amazed at his [Philip's] dullness of comprehension, Christ asked with pained surprise, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip?" Is it possible that you do not see the Father in the works He does through Me? Do you not believe that I came to testify of the Father? "How sayest thou then, Show us the Father?" "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." Christ had not ceased to be God when He became man. Though He had humbled Himself to humanity, the Godhead was still His own. Christ alone could represent the Father to humanity, and this representation the disciples had been privileged to behold for over three years." (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, page 663, 'Let not your heart be troubled'*)

Again with respect to Philip's request Ellen White wrote

"He [Philip] wished Christ to reveal the Father in bodily form; but God had already revealed himself in Christ. The doubt was answered by words of reproof. "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?" Christ said. Is it possible that after walking with me, hearing my words, seeing my miracle of feeding the five thousand, of healing the sick of the dread leprosy, of raising Lazarus, whose body had seen corruption, and who was indeed a prey to death, you do not know me? Is it possible that you do not see the Father in the works which he does through me? Do you not believe that I came to testify of the Father? "How sayest thou then, Show us the Father?" "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." I am the brightness of his glory, the express image of his person. "Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak

unto you, I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake."

Christ emphatically impressed on the disciples the fact that they could see the Father by faith only. God cannot be seen in external form by any human being. Christ alone can represent the Father to humanity; and this representation the disciples had been privileged to behold for over three years." (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, October 19<sup>th</sup> 1897, 'Words of Comfort'*)

What is being said here is that God the Father has an external bodily form although fallen humanity cannot behold it. We are to see the Father by faith alone. Notice that Jesus said though, "I am in the Father, and the Father in me". Ellen White added later

"If the disciples had believed in this vital connection between the Father and the Son, their faith would not have forsaken them when they saw his suffering and death to save a perishing world. Christ was seeking to lead them from their low condition of faith to the higher experience they might have received had they truly realized what he was, -- God in human flesh." (*Ibid*)

### **A true Son**

Before we close this section I have one more thought to share with you. This is that by some, God is often thought of as remote from any understanding of our own personal experiences but notice here what Ellen White says about the fact that God did give His Son.

"The plan of salvation had been laid before the creation of the earth; for Christ is "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8); yet it was a struggle, even with the King of the universe, to yield up His Son to die for the guilty race. But "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Oh, the mystery of redemption! the love of God for a world that did not love Him! Who can know the depths of that love which "passeth knowledge"? Through endless ages immortal minds, seeking to comprehend the mystery of that incomprehensible love, will wonder and adore." John 3:16." (*Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets page 63, 1890, 'The Plan of Redemption'*)

This brings home the reality of God giving up His only begotten Son as atonement for the sins of men. Even God struggled in letting Him go. In the very same vein of thought, Ellen White said in Early Writings

"Said the angel, "Think ye that the Father yielded up His dearly beloved Son without a struggle? No, no." It was even a struggle with the God of heaven, whether to let guilty man perish, or to give His darling Son to die for them.

Angels were so interested for man's salvation that there could be found among them those who would yield their glory and give their life for perishing man. "But," said my accompanying angel, "that would avail nothing." 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 page 127*)

Here again, through the spirit of prophecy, we can see it said that Christ truly is a Son. This was not make believe or metaphorical. The Son really is God's son. If we say that this second Person of the Godhead is not truly God's Son then we destroy the reality of God giving Him. In fact we destroy the gospel.

We shall now go to section six. This is where we shall see that Jesus really is the divine Son of God.

## **The Begotten Series**

## **Section six**

### **The Son of God**

This is the third of a six-part theological study concerning the Christ of the Bible. Its purpose is to show that He is truly the Son of God.

Officially, Seventh-day Adventists say today that Christ, in His pre-existence, is not a true Son. This is because they do not accept that He is begotten (sourced) of God (the Father). This means that they regard such terminologies as Father and Son as only metaphorical (figurative). This leads them to conclude that for the sake of the redemption of mankind, the two divine personalities, known by these designations, are only role-playing these parts.

This present-day reasoning of Seventh-day Adventism is totally contrary to what was believed by Seventh-day Adventists whilst Ellen White was alive. It is also contrary to what was believed by early Christianity. It was even at variance with developing Christianity although by saying that the Son is everlastingly begotten of the Father (this was at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325), the latter did go beyond what the Bible reveals. This led to a corruption of what the Scriptures say regarding the Godhead. It eventually developed into a teaching that became the central belief of apostate Christianity. This teaching is the orthodox doctrine of the trinity.

Within orthodoxy, the belief is maintained that the Son is of (meaning belonging to) the same substance as the Father. This is something else that is not revealed in Scripture but it was the reasoning that led to the formulation of the Creed of Nicaea (AD 325). These two beliefs therefore (everlastingly begotten, also of the same substance) are purely human speculation (that which is not revealed by God). This is the entire problem with the orthodox trinity doctrine. It is based on speculation. Remove the speculation and there is no trinity doctrine.

The trinity doctrine, as officially expressed today by Seventh-day Adventists, is different from orthodoxy. This is inasmuch as they do not accept that Christ is begotten of the Father therefore they do not believe He is a true Son. A major part of the trinity debate revolves around this issue. They still claim though, along with orthodoxy, that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all of one indivisible trinitarian being.

#### **The Son of God controversy**

The entire Godhead problem revolves around the fact that the Scriptures reveal that both the Father and the Son are said to be God. By reason of this study, this is the mystery upon which we are attempting to shed some light. In brief, it is to understand more fully what John meant when he wrote

[“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word](#)

was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.” John 1:1-3

Reasoning intelligently, an individual cannot be the same individual (personality) as the one they are with so the Scriptures reveal here two separate individuals (two separate personages or personalities). Both are said to be God. Note in these verses that John does not mention the Holy Spirit. Interesting also is that the Greek actually reads “the Word was with **the** God” (Gr. ton qeon). If translated this way, the verse would say “In [the] beginning was the Word, and the Word was with **the God**, and the Word was God”. Note the bracketed the denoting that there is no article present. This article (the) therefore is supplied.

From the very beginning of his gospel, John needed to carefully differentiate between God and the Word (God the Father and His Son). He could not afford to cause confusion. I say this because at that time, some were trying to inculcate, into the Christian faith, heresies concerning Christ. John therefore would have chosen his words very carefully.

The author of these notes regards the gospel of John as a divinely inspired theology (see John 20:31). He believes it was written to combat the heresies to which reference has been made above. This I believe was John’s entire purpose in writing it. It was not just another gospel concerning the life and teachings of Jesus. This is why the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke are called the synoptic gospels. John’s gospel is so much different. Concerning the Son of God, it is a divine theology.

Take note that John did not say it was the God (the Father) who became flesh but “**the Word**” (John 1:14). This is why Ellen White repeatedly referred to Christ as **the Son** of the infinite God (the Father). She did not say He was the infinite God Himself, at least not as far as personality is concerned. We shall be taking a look at some of these quotes later. As the scriptures also say

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high” Hebrew 1:1-3

Here the Son is said to be the “**express image**” of God’s person (Gr. hupostasis). This shows that as a personality He cannot be the same personality (personage) as the one of whom He is an image. This is only a reasonable conclusion to draw. Again we are talking in terms of two separate personalities, both of whom are God. This is a major part of the mystery of God. As the writer of Hebrews went on to say



“But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.” Hebrews 1:8

The author of these notes reasons that it is only possible for the Son to be truly God if He is begotten of God meaning God from God. In Hebrews 1:3, the Son is said to be the “express image” of the hypostasis of God, meaning the exact likeness of who and everything that God is. This is in keeping with the NEB translation of John 1:1 which says

“When all things began, the word already was. The word dwelt with God and what God was, the word was.” John 1:1 New English Bible

The word *hypostasis* means *substance or under-girding* etc. In other words, it is the *hypostasis* that makes something what it is. This can be seen above where the NEB says “what God was, the Word was”.

### **Weight of evidence**

In this section we shall primarily be taking a look at what the New Testament Scriptures say concerning the One in Scripture referred to as the only begotten Son of God. As we have noted previously, the Seventh-day Adventist Church says today that He is not really a Son, at least not in His pre-existence. This is why they often refer to Him today as the Second Person of the Godhead. This was totally opposite to what was believed and taught by the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism. This includes Ellen White. She maintained that Christ was begotten of God therefore He is a true son.

So how can we know for sure as to who is correct and who is in error in this matter? The only way that this can be determined is to study for ourselves to see what the Scriptures say and then decide from the weight of evidence that we find. In the Third Volume of the Testimonies Ellen White wrote

“The practical and the doctrinal should be combined in order to impress hearts with the importance of yielding to the claims of truth after the understanding has been convinced by the weight of evidence.” (*Ellen G. White, 3rd Volume Testimonies, page 237, ‘Self-caring ministers’*)

We also find in the same volume

“The unbelief that demands perfect knowledge will never yield to the evidence that God is pleased to give. He requires of His people faith that rests upon the weight of evidence, not upon perfect knowledge. Those followers of Christ who accept the light that God sends them must obey the voice of God speaking to them when there are many other voices crying out against it. It requires discernment to distinguish the voice of God.” (*Ellen G. White, 3rd Volume Testimonies, page 258, ‘The Laodicean Church’*)

Ellen White was referring here to the Testimonies that God has seen fit to put in

His church but the principle is wide and deep. We need discernment as we study the Scriptures. In *The Desire of Ages* Ellen White penned these words

“God does not compel men to give up their unbelief. Before them are light and darkness, truth and error. It is for them to decide which they will accept. The human mind is endowed with power to discriminate between right and wrong. God designs that men shall not decide from impulse, but from weight of evidence, carefully comparing scripture with scripture.” (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages*, page 458, ‘Among snares’)

Note her latter words “comparing scripture with scripture”. Regarding discovering whether Christ is truly the Son of God or not, this is something we shall be doing later in this section. In the next paragraph she wrote

“Many are deceived today in the same way as were the Jews.” (*Ibid*)

She explains

“Religious teachers read the Bible in the light of their own understanding and traditions; and the people do not search the Scriptures for themselves, and judge for themselves as to what is truth; but they yield up their judgment, and commit their souls to their leaders.” (*Ibid, page 459*)

This is still very true today. People are still being blinded by tradition, also by what their leadership believe.

No matter what beliefs others may hold, we should never surrender our thinking to others. We must study for ourselves and draw our own conclusions. We must remember too that our eternal lives are at stake. This is something that we cannot afford to trust to others. In 1891 Ellen White penned these words

“Do not hesitate to decide from the weight of evidence. Do not enlist on the side of error, but wholly and entirely on the side of truth.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 21st July 1891, ‘At Willis, Mich.’*)

Five years previous in an article called Intelligent Faith Ellen White wrote

“There is always sufficient evidence upon which to base an intelligent faith. But God will never remove from any man all occasion for doubts. Those who love to dwell in the atmosphere of doubt and questioning unbelief can have the unenviable privilege. He who turns from the weight of evidence because there are a few things that he cannot make plain to his finite understanding, will be left to the cold, chilling atmosphere of unbelief and skepticism, and will make shipwreck of faith.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 30th December 1886, ‘Intelligent faith’*)

Again regarding intelligent faith she wrote

“God would have men believe, not because there is no possibility of doubt, but because there is abundant evidence upon which to base an intelligent faith.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 15th July 1886. ‘A lesson from the miracle at Bethesda’*)

### **Current Seventh-day Adventist theology**

Regarding the identity of Christ, the current theology of Seventh-day Adventism is expressed in a number of places, one of which is in the book *The Trinity* (2002). This is a book, officially authorised by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, that is meant to specifically address the issues involved in this present trinity debate. It is co-authored by Woodrow Whidden, Jerry Moon and John Reeve.

Whilst we cannot quote here everything concerning the Father/Son debate that this book says, suffice to say that on page 97 it reads (this was after expressing the idea that the terminologies Father and Son need not to be taken literally)

“Far from suggesting that the Father generated or begat the Son as some sort of derived or created semigod, the imagery of Father and Son points to the eternal and profound intimacy that has always existed between the first and second persons of the Godhead as divine “equals” through all eternity (past, present, and future).” (*Woodrow Whidden, The Trinity, page 97 ‘Biblical objections to the trinity’*)

First of all note that Whidden says that the terms Father and Son have reference to the “eternal and profound intimacy” that exists between the two divine personalities. He does not say that it has anything to do with any ontological oneness between them. Notice also he refers to these Father and Son concepts as “imagery”. Whilst no one will argue that the closeness and the reality of this intimacy is beyond the limited comprehension of humanity, the implication here is that if Christ is said to be a real son (begotten/sourced of the Father), this makes Him “some sort of derived or created semigod”. We shall return to this thought later, suffice to say here that Whidden makes it look as though all who believe in a real Father and a real Son do not believe that Christ is truly God. Throughout this book, this very same thought is projected.

This latter reasoning was never the consensus view of Christianity, neither whilst Ellen White was alive was it the predominant view of Seventh-day Adventists. All of these did say that Christ is truly the divine Son of God but in saying this they were saying that they believed He is God in the highest sense of meaning. Those who entertain the idea that a begotten Son denigrates Christ, lamentably fail to understand the reasoning behind the begotten theology.

On the other hand, those who say that Christ is a true Son also believe that He is God Himself begotten. These accusations therefore (as Whidden’s above) are not only totally unfounded but are probably based on ignorance of what it was (and still is) believed by those whom they are condemning.

The book *The Trinity* maintains that those who regard Christ as being a real Son (begotten/sourced of God) are all denying His full and complete divinity. This means that according to present day Seventh-day Adventist theology, all the trinity creeds of Christendom deny the full and complete deity of Christ. This is quite an allegation. This is also nonsensical reasoning. I say this because the entire faith of early Christianity was built upon the premise that Christ is begotten of God (a true Son) therefore to say that in believing this they depicted Christ as some sort of created semi-god, is to contradict common sense. As did Seventh-day Adventists whilst Ellen White was alive, early Christianity said that Christ was God Himself in the person of His own Son. This is true begotten theology.

According to current Seventh-day Adventist theology, the only way to express the full and complete divinity of Christ is to say that like the Father He is not begotten. This makes Him to be, because Seventh-day Adventist theology also says that the Holy Spirit is a person like the Father and Son, one of three unbegotten divine individuals.

If remaining on its own, this reasoning is Tritheism (the belief in three God's) so how do Seventh-day Adventists arrive at the solution that the Son is the one and the same God as the Father and the Holy Spirit? This is a very good question. The only answer that can be given is that they say that all three divine personalities constitute one indivisible trinity (three-in-one) structure. This is detailed in their official Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology (see pages 105-204). It is also expressed as the second of their fundamental beliefs.

### **Ellen White - in harmony with early Christianity and the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism**

Whilst Ellen was alive, Seventh-day Adventists believed and taught the very same as did the very early Christians (this was before the purity of the Christian faith became tainted with human philosophy). This is because they believed that Christ is truly begotten of God and is therefore God essentially and a true Son. These allegations of Whidden therefore also apply to them. As we proceed through this series, we shall continue to see this past begotten theology of Seventh-day Adventism. It can also be reviewed in the detailed history sections. See sections 15, 20, 21, 22 and 23 here

#### [A Detailed History of the Trinity Doctrine](#)

Whidden is also making this same accusation regarding Ellen White. This is because she believed that Christ is truly begotten of God therefore a true son. In 1894 when in Australia completing the manuscripts for *The Desire of Ages*, she asked the youth of her day

[“Who is Christ? -- He is the only begotten Son of the living God.” \(Ellen G. White, \*The Youth's Instructor\*, 28th June 1894, 'Grow in grace'\)](#)

She then added

“He is to the Father as a word that expresses the thought, -- as a thought made audible. Christ is the word of God. Christ said to Philip, "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father." His words were the echo of God's words. Christ was the likeness of God, the brightness of his glory, the express image of his person." (*Ibid*)

Notice very importantly that Ellen White differentiates between the One whom she terms “the only begotten Son” and “the living God”. If you missed this point then please read it again. She is speaking here in terms of pre-existence. Again, as does the Scriptures, she emphasises that the Son is the “express image” of God’s “person”. Note also her opening thought. That just like a word expresses a thought so Christ is to the Father. In other words, Christ is an expression of the Father. As Jesus said to Philip

“...Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? (see John 14:9)

We know that Ellen White believed that Christ is literally begotten of the Father. This is because in 1895 when she was in the process of preparing *The Desire of Ages* she wrote

“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, 'Christ our complete salvation'*)

This was then in keeping with what was then the denominational faith of Seventh-day Adventists. For further details see the above-mentioned sections in the detailed history series. For those who believe that Ellen White did not mean literally begotten note the words she wrote just 6 weeks later. This is when she said in the *Review and Herald*

“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'*)

Here we can see that instead of using the word begotten to explain Christ’s source of being as a separate personality from God (the Father), Ellen White says that He was “made in the express image” of his Fathers person. Her

previous statement had said, “begotten in the express image of the Father's person”. In her mind therefore, the word “begotten” was synonymous with “made”. The “Eternal Father”, the “unchangeable one” is the same personality as “the living God” (see above)

Four years later, which was the year following the publication of *The Desire of Ages*, Ellen White penned these words (this was with reference to Jesus saying “before Abraham was I AM” – see 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 complimented her begotten and made statements above. She is saying that Christ's divine life is immeasurable, at least by any standard known to humanity. This does not mean it is immeasurable to God. In 1906 Ellen White wrote (which is no different than she had always maintained)

“The world was made by him, "and without him was not anything made that was made." If Christ made all things, he existed before all things. The words spoken in regard to this are so decisive that no one need be left in doubt. Christ was God essentially, and in the highest sense. He was with God from all eternity, God over all, blessed forevermore.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald 5th April 1906. ‘The Word made Flesh’*)

The words “from all eternity” could not have been intended to mean not begotten. This would have Ellen White contradicting herself.

In the official Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist theology (this is the official exposition of what Seventh-day Adventists believe), Fernando Canale, in summary of what he has previously said puts it this way

“There is, therefore, no ground within the biblical understanding of the Godhead for the idea of a generation of the Son from the Father.” (*Fernando Canale, Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia, Volume 12, page 125, ‘The doctrine of God’*)

On the same page he says

“In the Bible, therefore, no ground is found for the idea that there is an ontological subordination of the Son to the Father or that the divine reality of the Father has in any way a primacy of origin over the divine reality of the Son”. (*Ibid*)

This really does sum up the current official position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church regarding whether Christ is truly the pre-existent Son of God or not.

Canale says that He is not begotten (sourced) of the Father therefore He is not truly a son, at least not in His pre-existence. This contradicts what we have been told in Scripture and through the spirit of prophecy.

### **Christ fully God**

In agreement with early Christianity and later orthodoxy, the predominant belief of early Seventh-day Adventism was that in every sense of meaning, Christ is fully God. They did not regard Him as a lesser personality than the Father but equal to Him. According to their reasoning, the difference between the Father and the Son was that the pre-existent Christ is sourced (begotten) of the Father therefore He is a true Son. This means that He has no existence separate from the Father. This was the testimony of Jesus Himself. When Philip asked Jesus to show the disciples the Father, Jesus said

“ ... Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? Believeest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake.” John 14:9-11

Here is the mystery of the oneness between God and Christ. If we have seen Christ we have seen the Father. So how are we to reason this mystery? We shall do as Ellen White says, meaning we shall continue to search through the Scriptures to see what evidence we can find to determine what God has revealed concerning the relationship between Himself and Christ.

In this section, we shall begin with the profession of faith upon which Jesus Himself said that His Church would be built. As we shall see, this profession is that He is the Son of the living God. This will be the subject matter of this section. As we study together, let us remember the divine counsel to decide from the weight of evidence (see above). If we do this then we can be sure that God will abundantly bless us.

### **Jesus the Son of God - The Christian profession of faith**

It was the outspoken Peter who uttered the greatest example of the profession of the Christian faith. The Scriptures tell us that

“When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?” Matthew 16:13

The disciples answered Jesus by telling Him that some were saying that He was John the Baptist or Elijah whilst others were saying that He was Jeremiah or one of the other prophets. It was following this that Jesus asked the most important question of all. It was not “whom do others say that I am” but “whom say ye that I

am?" (Matthew 16:15). Jesus had now made this a personal question. Just like it does to us today, this demanded a personal confession of faith. It was Peter in his own distinctive style who was the first to answer

"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:16)

This was the second time Peter made such a confession. The first time was after the feeding of the 5000 and the rejection of Jesus in Galilee (see John 6:69). Peter did not say that Jesus was going to become the Son of God at the resurrection (this is when some say Christ became a son) or as some say He was a son because He was born of the flesh of His mother Mary (meaning at the incarnation), but that He was the "Son of the living God". We need to remember here that Peter had not yet grasped the idea that Jesus was going to die let alone be resurrected.

Through the spirit of prophecy, we have been given a wonderful insight to this personal confession of Peter. Whilst there is too much to quote it all here, what we will quote is that which Ellen White wrote in *The Desire of Ages*

"From the first, Peter had believed Jesus to be the Messiah." (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 412, 'The foreshadowing of the cross')

The Messiahship of Jesus was not a problem area with the disciples. They had already accepted Christ as such. She continued

"Many others who had been convicted by the preaching of John the Baptist, and had accepted Christ, began to doubt as to John's mission when he was imprisoned and put to death; and they now doubted that Jesus was the Messiah, for whom they had looked so long. Many of the disciples who had ardently expected Jesus to take His place on David's throne left Him when they perceived that He had no such intention. But Peter and his companions turned not from their allegiance. The vacillating course of those who praised yesterday and condemned today did not destroy the faith of the true follower of the Saviour. Peter declared, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." He waited not for kingly honors to crown his Lord, but accepted Him in His humiliation.

Peter had expressed the faith of the twelve. Yet the disciples were still far from understanding Christ's mission." (*Ibid* page 412)

She then explains why, in the minds of the disciples, this misunderstanding had existed

"The opposition and misrepresentation of the priests and rulers, while it could not turn them away from Christ, still caused them great perplexity. They did not see their way clearly. The influence of their early training, the teaching of the rabbis, the power of tradition, still intercepted their view of truth. From time



to time precious rays of light from Jesus shone upon them, yet often they were like men groping among shadows.” (*Ibid*)

This is still very true today. Things traditionally believed still blind eyes to the truth. It is also often that leaders do the misrepresenting. This is why as Seventh-day Adventists we must be very careful not to allow our leadership to do our thinking for us. Just because they believe something to be true, this does not mean that we have to believe it. We are to study the Scriptures for ourselves and allow the Holy Spirit to convict us of what we read. I am sure that our leadership would agree with this reasoning. Ellen White did add though (and this is the very important part of what she wrote)

“But on this day, before they were brought face to face with the great trial of their faith, the Holy Spirit rested upon them in power. For a little time their eyes were turned away from "the things which are seen," to behold "the things which are not seen." 2 Cor. 4:18. Beneath the guise of humanity they discerned the glory of the Son of God.” (*Ibid*)

It was because the Holy Spirit rested upon the disciples in power that enabled them to discern the true identity of Christ. As Ellen White said, they “discerned the glory of the Son of God”. These words were not used by Peter in any metaphorical (figurative) way but in a sense that was literal. Peter and the others, solely because of the impress of the Holy Spirit, had discerned the divinity of Christ. This is why they termed Him **the Son** of the living God. For obvious reasons they could not say that He was God.

Peter was inspired by the Holy Spirit to make his profession of faith (“**Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God**”). This profession had nothing to do with the incarnation. It was with reference to Christ’s divinity and His pre-existent relationship to His Father. The disciples had seen “the glory of the Son of God”. In His beautiful prayer prior to His experience in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus said

“And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.” John 17:5

Peter and the other disciples had discerned this “glory”. It was Christ’s pre-existent glory. Now we can see why Jesus responded to Peter’s confession by saying

“Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.” Matthew 16:17

It was the Holy Spirit directly that had urged this confession from the lips of Peter. This was prior to any New Testament Scripture being written. The only Scriptures that the disciples had available to them were what we term today the Old Testament. Peter’s profession therefore was direct revelation from God. The Holy Spirit was resting upon him with power. This is why Ellen White wrote

"The truth which Peter had confessed is the foundation of the believer's faith. It is that which Christ Himself has declared to be eternal life. But the possession of this knowledge was no ground for self-glorification. Through no wisdom or goodness of his own had it been revealed to Peter. Never can humanity, of itself, attain to a knowledge of the divine. "It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know?" Job 11:8." (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 412, 'The foreshadowing of the cross')

She then answers how humanity can have knowledge of these things

"Only the spirit of adoption can reveal to us the deep things of God, which "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man." "God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." 1 Cor. 2:9, 10." (*Ibid*)

Here we are told that it is only when we become the adopted sons and daughters of God that we can truly understand the deep spiritual things of God. This is why to the world (to the unconverted) these things are foolishness (see 1 Corinthians 2:9-14)

"The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him;" and the fact that Peter discerned the glory of Christ was an evidence that he had been "taught of God." Ps. 25:14; John 6:45. Ah, indeed, "blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee." (*Ibid*)

Peter's profession was direct revelation from God. He did not acquire his understanding by human means. He had been "taught of God". He had been shown the divinity of Christ (His glory) and had therefore proclaimed Him to be the Son of God.

As to identity of personality, Jesus was not the infinite God (see John 17:3). He was the Son of the infinite God. It was on this profession that Jesus said that the Christian Church would be built. As Jesus said to Peter

"And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18)

Jesus is the divine Son of God. This is His glory. It is also the Rock upon which the Christian church is built. It is the profession of the Christian faith. All else is secondary.

### **The Jews understood the claims of Jesus**

When Jesus was brought before Caiaphas at the night trial, the high priest asked Him

“I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God.” Matthew 26:63

Caiaphas was not asking Jesus if He was the Son of God in any metaphorical (figurative) sense. He was speaking literally. This is why Jesus had been brought before him. He had been accused of blasphemy. He had claimed to be the Son of God. The Jews said that it was because of this He deserved to die.

At the day trial the next morning, the Scriptures reveal that the high priests, elders and scribes came together to question Jesus

“Art thou the Christ? tell us.” Luke 22:67

The Scriptures record that Jesus answered

“If I tell you, ye will not believe: And if I also ask you, ye will not answer me, nor let me go.” Luke 22:67-68

Jesus then told them that hereafter the Son of man would sit on the right hand of the power of God. The Scripture then say that after He had said this they together asked Him

“Art thou then the Son of God?” to which Jesus replied, “Ye say that I am”. Luke 22:70

Luke ends the record of this encounter by saying

“And they said, What need we any further witness? for we ourselves have heard of his own mouth.” Luke 22:71

The questions that Jesus was asked at His trial were obviously with respect to the encounters that He previously had with the Jews. These are such that are recorded in John chapters 5, 8 and 10 etc. We can see therefore that the Jews knew exactly who Jesus was claiming to be. Let us not make any mistake about it. They all knew that in the **literal sense** of its meaning, he was claiming to be the Son of God, hence the question of Caiaphas – “tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God”. If Christ was not being asked this in a literal sense, then the entirety of the accusations do not make any sense. As the Scriptures say

“Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.” John 5:18

Jesus continually spoke of God as His Father and Himself as God’s Son. This was no metaphorical (figurative) claim or understanding of this term. Obviously the Jews saw nothing figurative in it. This is why, by His profession to be the Son of God, they regarded Jesus as claiming to be “equal with God”. If they had

believed His words to be metaphorical (figurative) they would not have spoken as they did here, neither would they have had just cause to bring Him before Caiaphas on the claim of blasphemy etc. This is only reasonable exegesis.

That the Jews took the claims of Jesus literally is not in question. As they said to Him on one occasion

“ ... For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God.” John 10:33

It can only be said again that the Jews obviously saw nothing metaphorical (figurative) in the claims of Jesus. They said that by them He was making Himself to be God.

“Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God? John 10:36

As can be seen here, Jesus clearly said that His claim was that He was the Son of God but the Jews said this was blasphemy. This is why they were going to stone Him. His were literal claims and the Jews realised it. Ellen White had something to say about this encounter of Jesus with the Jews. She said

“With what firmness and power he uttered these words. The Jews had never before heard such words from human lips, and a convicting influence attended them; for it seemed that divinity flashed through humanity as Jesus said, "I and my Father are one. The words of Christ were full of deep meaning as he put forth the claim that he and the Father were of one substance, possessing the same attributes. The Jews understood his meaning, there was no reason why they should misunderstand, and they took up stones to stone him.” (*Ellen G. White Signs of the Times 20th November 1893, 'The True Sheep Respond to the Voice of the Shepherd'*)

As can be clearly seen, this “one substance” was with respect to possession of attributes, nothing else. Note too that Ellen White said that there was no reason for the Jews not to understand what Jesus meant. She said, “The Jews understood His meaning, there was no reason why they should misunderstand”. She then went on to say

“The Majesty of heaven stood, calmly assured, as a god before his adversaries. Their scowling faces, their hands filled with stones, did not intimidate him. He knew that unseen forces, legions of angels, were round about him, and at one word from his lips they would strike with dismay the throng, should they offer to cast upon him a single stone. He stood before them undaunted. Why did not the stones fly to the mark? (*Ibid*)

Ellen White answered her own question by saying

“It was because divinity flashed through humanity, and they received a revelation, and were convicted that his were no common claims. Their hands relax and the stones fall to the ground. His words had asserted his divinity, but now his personal presence, the light of his eye, the majesty of his attitude, bore witness to the fact that he was the beloved Son of God.”  
(*Ibid*)

The Jews knew that this claim of Jesus was not in the sense that all who are God’s people are sons (and daughters) of God. Jesus was THE Son of God, the only begotten of God. The Jews knew full well that Christ was making this claim in a special sense and not one that was common. As Ellen White said, because they received a revelation of Christ’s divinity, they were convicted that His were “no common claims”. They had personally witnessed that everything about Him said that “he was the beloved Son of God”. The Jews had no misunderstanding as regards the claims of Jesus. This is why they said to Pilate

“We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God.” (John 19:7)

If the Jews had regarded this claim to be the Son of God in a common sense, they would not have condemned Jesus to death. It is only reasonable to believe that neither would they have done so if they had thought that He had meant it in some figurative way. They knew that His was a literal claim. This is why they said He ought to die.

### **A question of Fathers**

Jesus was not claiming to be the infinite God in personality but the Son of the infinite God. This we can also see in his wonderful prayer in the seventeenth chapter of John.

“Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.” John 17:1-5

Needless to say, Jesus did not regard Himself as “the only true God”. This latter personage was His Father in Heaven (the infinite God).

In a previous encounter with the Jews, Jesus had said to them

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may

marvel. For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him.” John 5:19-23

There can be no doubting whom Jesus was claiming to be. He was claiming to be the Son of God in the highest sense of its meaning. It should go without saying that He was not using this title in any metaphoric (figurative) sense. With reference to this same dispute, Ellen White wrote in *The Desire of Ages*

“Jesus claimed equal rights with God in doing a work equally sacred, and of the same character with that which engaged the Father in heaven. But the Pharisees were still more incensed. He had not only broken the law, according to their understanding, but in calling God "His own Father" had declared Himself equal with God. John 5:18, R. V. (*Ellen White, 'The Desire of Ages' page 207, 'Bethesda and the Sanhedrin'*)

Notice here that to be specific and in keeping with her own comments, Ellen White quoted from the Revised Version of the Scriptures, not the KJV. Thus she quoted Jesus as calling God “His own Father”. She would not have been as specific as this if she had quoted the KJV. This version simply says “God was His Father” (John 5:18). She obviously wanted to stress the literalness of this Sonship. She continued

“The whole nation of the Jews called God their Father, therefore they would not have been so enraged if Christ had represented Himself as standing in the same relation to God. But they accused Him of blasphemy, showing that they understood Him as making this claim in the highest sense.” (*Ibid*)

Through the spirit of prophecy, we are told here that the Jews knew exactly what Jesus was claiming. Note particularly that Ellen White said that the Jews “understood Him as making this claim in the highest sense”. This was not with regards to the incarnation or some forthcoming adoption at the resurrection: neither was it in some figurative sense. It was with reference to Christ’s pre-existence.

Christ was indeed the pre-existent Son of God. This is His identity. It is who he is. There is nothing metaphorical (figurative) about it. He really is the Son of God. This is the “highest sense” in which this term can be used and understood. Any other conclusion would not be in the highest sense.

Interesting to note is that there are numerous (far too many to quote here) translations of the Scriptures that have “own Father”, particularly the more modern versions. It is also interesting that a few others that say differently. This is such as the Weymouth translation that says

“On this account then the Jews were all the more eager to put Him to death

-- because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also spoke of God as being in a special sense His Father, thus putting Himself on a level with God."  
John 5:18 Weymouth

Interesting also is the Daniel Mace translation. This one says

"therefore the Jews were the more eager to kill him, because he had not only violated the sabbath, but likewise, because he had said that God was his proper father, making himself equal with God." Mace translation (1729)

In 1901 in the *Review and Herald* Ellen White again commented on this incident.

"The whole nation called God their Father, and if Jesus had done this in the same sense in which they did, the Pharisees would not have been so enraged. But they accused Jesus of blasphemy, showing that they understood that Christ claimed God as His Father in the very highest sense."  
(*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 5th March 1901, 'Lessons from the Christ-life'*)

Can this be put more plainly? Christ was the Son of God in the "very highest sense" of meaning. There is nothing metaphorical (figurative) about it. How much more evidence do we need to believe that Christ really is the Son of God?

"Christ threw back the charge of blasphemy, with the words, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what He seeth the Father do: for what things soever He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son, and showeth Him all things that himself doeth." My authority for the work that I am doing, He said, is the fact that I am God's Son, one with Him in nature, will, and purpose. I co-operate with Him in His work. My Father loves me, and communicates to me all His counsels. Nothing is planned by the Father in heaven that is not fully opened to the Son." (*Ibid*)

Is there really need to say any more!

### **The "I am"**

At Sinai, when God commanded Moses to gather around the mount those whom He had led out of Egypt, Christ was there beside Him. As Ellen White put it

"The earth shook and trembled as if convulsed, and the thunder peals were caught up in reverberations from peak to peak, far and near. The stately tread of the Lord Jehovah and of his Son was upon that mountain." (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 11th December 1879, 'Christ's followers the light of the world'*)

Christ claimed this Sonship with God. This was when in what is probably the most well known encounter that Jesus had with the Jews He said to them

“... Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.” (John 8:58)

Whilst we will not be going into detail here regarding these words of Jesus it is important to note that this encounter concerned fathers. The Jews claimed that God was their Father but Jesus disagreed. He had said that they were of their father the devil. By the way that Jesus used the term “I am”, the Jews obviously knew what Jesus was claiming. We know this because the Scriptures tell us (this was in response to the above words of Jesus)

“Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.” John 8:59

In commenting on this encounter, Ellen White wrote in *The Desire of Ages*

“Because He was, and avowed Himself to be, the Son of God, they were bent on destroying Him. Now many of the people, siding with the priests and rabbis, took up stones to cast at Him. “But Jesus hid Himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.

The Light was shining in darkness; but “the darkness apprehended it not.” John 1:5, R. V.” (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 470, ‘The light of life’)

In this world today and in abundance, this same darkness still exists. In comparison to its total population, there are so very few who actually believe that Jesus really is the divine Son of God. This is even though He “avowed Himself” to be so. Will we not believe His personal testimony?

### **The personal testimony of Jesus**

Jesus knew exactly what His relationship was with God. When He heard that the Jews had cast out from the temple the man whose sight He had earlier restored, He found him again and said to him

“Dost thou believe on the Son of God? John 9:35

The man answered Jesus by asking “Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? John 9:36. The Scriptures record

“And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee.” John 9:37

Do we wish to argue with Jesus Himself? He very clearly said that He is the Son of God. This was no figurative claim. It was very real and it was literal. The blind man was told that the one that had healed him was the Son of God. Quite obviously this man who had been blind would only have understood this in a literal sense. In more ways than one, his eyes were now open.



There is another experience of Jesus where He claimed to be the divine Son of God. This was when He heard that His friend Lazarus was sick. Jesus said to His disciples regarding that sickness

“This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.” John 11:4

Again Jesus refers to Himself as the Son of God. He was clearly not using this title to simply denote the intimacy of relationship that He had with His Father.

Throughout His life on earth, Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. This is why the Jews said He was a blasphemer. Perhaps the best known time is when He said to Nicodemus

“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. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” John 3:16-18

We discussed the Greek word *monogenes* translated here “only begotten” (meaning the only one of its kind that has come to be) in section four so we will not comment again here, suffice to say that if Jesus is really the Son of God then He must be begotten (sourced) of God. As we noted in section two and section three, this was the very same reasoning of early Christians.

### **Challenged by Satan**

Jesus had no problems with His own identity (who He was) but it certainly concerned Satan. When he came to Jesus, tempting Him to doubt His true identity, he said, “**If thou be the Son of God**” (see Matthew 4:6). It was on the point of Sonship that the devil challenged Jesus. Prove who you are he said, prove that you really are the Son of God. Ellen White had something interesting to say about this encounter.

“Not without a struggle could Jesus listen in silence to the arch-deceiver. But the Son of God was not to prove His divinity to Satan, or to explain the reason of His humiliation. By conceding to the demands of the rebel, nothing for the good of man or the glory of God would be gained. Had Christ complied with the suggestion of the enemy, Satan would still have said, Show me a sign that I may believe you to be the Son of God.” (Ellen White, *The Desire of Ages*. Page 119, *The temptation*)

This was at the very beginning of Christ’s ministry. Satan knew that Jesus regarded Himself as the Son of God. Notice here that Satan said “**If thou be the**

Son of God” whilst Ellen White said “But the Son of God was not to prove His divinity to Satan”. In the eyes of Ellen White, the terminology “Son of God” was synonymous with “divinity”. This is very important to note.

Satan was challenging Jesus to display His powers of divinity. This, according to him, would have proved that He was the Son of God. He was in fact attempting to make Jesus doubt His Father's testimony. This testimony was that He was the Son of God.

“The words from heaven, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17), were still sounding in the ears of Satan. But he was determined to make Christ disbelieve this testimony. The word of God was Christ's assurance of His divine mission. He had come to live as a man among men, and it was the word that declared His connection with heaven. It was Satan's purpose to cause Him to doubt that word. If Christ's confidence in God could be shaken, Satan knew that the victory in the whole controversy would be his. He could overcome Jesus. He hoped that under the force of despondency and extreme hunger, Christ would lose faith in His Father, and work a miracle in His own behalf. Had He done this, the plan of salvation would have been broken.” (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, page 119, 'The temptation'*)

Here can be seen the entire point of Satan's challenge. He was urging Christ to prove His Sonship, meaning to prove His divinity. If we miss this point we miss everything about the temptation. The devil could never have meant these words to be metaphorical (representative of the loving relationship that Jesus had with the Father). This would not make any sense at all. Ellen White also said of Christ's temptation in the wilderness

“In the first temptation Satan had said, "If Thou art the Son of God." Evidence was now given him that Jesus was indeed all that He claimed to be. Divinity flashed through humanity as the Saviour said, "Get thee behind Me, Satan; for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve." With such power were these words spoken that Satan left the battlefield a conquered foe.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 11th April 1900, 'Victory over temptation'*)

Satan knew that Jesus claimed to be the divine Son of God and had asked Him to prove it. He did receive the evidence for which he was looking but it did not come to him in the way that he had expected.

### **The testimony of demons**

Satan's fellow angels also knew the identity of Jesus. With their leader they too had heard of the testimony of God the Father (Matthew 3:17). They said to Jesus

“What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?” Matthew 8:29

In His pre-existence, these demons had known Jesus as the divine Son of God. They were the fallen angels. Christ had once been their beloved commander, at least up until the time they had been deceived by Lucifer. Now they were encountering Him in His incarnate state. Through the spirit of prophecy we are told

“Well did Satan know who Christ was. When the Saviour went to Gadara, the evil spirits in the two madmen there cried out, "What have we to do with Thee, Jesus, Thou Son of God?" (Ellen G. White, *Bible Echo*, 23rd July 1900, ‘*Tempted in all points*’)

The Scriptures also tell us

“And unclean spirits, when they saw him, fell down before him, and cried, saying, Thou art the Son of God.” Mark 3:11

“What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not.” Mark 5:7

They also said of Jesus

“Thou art Christ the Son of God.” Luke 4:41

Even in His incarnation, these demons had no problems identifying Jesus. They realised His true identity. Just like all the others we have noted, they did not use this term “Son of God” in any figurative sense. Certainly they were not using this term simply as an expression of God’s love for the Son or the intimacy of relationship that the Father had with the Son. This would be a totally ridiculous conclusion to draw. As Ellen White wrote (after referring to the love shown by Jesus in healing people)

“He also cast out many demons, who, in leaving their victims, acknowledged Christ, saying, "Thou art the Son of God." (Ellen G. White, *Volume 2 Spirit of Prophecy*, page 201, ‘*Sermon on the Mount*’)

This in turn begs a question. If the demons know and confess that Christ is truly the Son of God, then why do not many Christians know and confess it today, particularly Seventh-day Adventist Christians?

### **John the Baptist**

John the Baptist had also said when in discussion with his own followers (here he was making reference to the baptism of Jesus)

“I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare

record that this is the Son of God.” John 1:32-33

The one whom God raised up (the voice crying in the wilderness) was to pave the way and herald the first advent of Christ. John claimed that Jesus is the Son of God. There is no reason not to believe that all those who heard John’s claims would only have understood this in a literal sense. John himself had heard the Fathers testimony (Matthew 3:17).

### **The disciples**

Nathanael’s initial encounter with Christ is a very interesting one. When Jesus told him that He (Jesus) had seen him under the fig tree he answered

“Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.” John 1:49

Interesting to note is that Ellen White said of Nathanael’s experience

“If Nathanael had trusted to the rabbis for guidance, he would never have found Jesus. It was by seeing and judging for himself that he became a disciple.” (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, page 140, ‘We have found the Messiah’*)

This is obviously counsel for us today. If we are to find the true Christ we must not rely upon others for what we believe but search the Scriptures for ourselves. This is what we are doing here in this study. As Ellen White later said

“While they trust to the guidance of human authority, none will come to a saving knowledge of the truth. Like Nathanael, we need to study God’s word for ourselves, and pray for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. He who saw Nathanael under the fig tree will see us in the secret place of prayer. Angels from the world of light are near to those who in humility seek for divine guidance.” (*Ibid page 141*)

Again Ellen White said of Nathanael (this really is very interesting)

“He [Nathanael] had advanced into more perfect light than had Philip; his perception went farther; his faith meant more; for he saw in Jesus of Nazareth the Son of God.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 24th March 1898, ‘In the master’s service’*)

So what had Philip acknowledged concerning Jesus?

“Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” John 1:44-45

Philip had told Nathanael that he had found the promised Messiah of the

Scriptures but as Ellen White said, Nathanael had gone further in his profession and had recognised Him as “the Son of God”. This is very interesting. It shows that in the understanding of Ellen White, the Messiahship of Jesus (the one whom Moses spoke of in the Scriptures) and His divine Sonship were two different things. I say this because some say that Son of God is only a metaphoric term for messiah. In the reasoning of Ellen White, it was not. Martha also said to Jesus (this was at the resurrection of her brother Lazarus)

“Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.” John 11:27

The word “Christ” (Gr christos) means the anointed one. Like Nathanael, Martha was saying here that she believed that Jesus was not only the anointed one (the promised Messiah – the Christ) but also the “Son of God”. When the disciples saw Jesus calm the winds on the Sea of Galilee they said to Him

“Of a truth thou art the Son of God”. Matthew 14:33

As we noted above, so we will not comment again here, it was through the direct revelation of the Holy Spirit that God Himself had revealed to the disciples the true identity of Jesus. As Seventh-day Adventists, we need that same revelation today.

### **The revilers at the cross**

Those who reviled Jesus at the cross knew very well who He claimed to be. They said to Him

“Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.” Matthew 27:40

They also said of Jesus

“He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.” Matthew 27:43

These revilers knew that Jesus had claimed to be the Son of God. This was their accusation against Him. This is why they said He was a blasphemer and deserved to die. They were obviously not saying these words because of the loving relationship that Jesus claimed to have had with God; neither did they say them in any metaphorical sense. This much again is reasonably obvious.

### **A Pagan’s confession**

When Jesus died, even a man the Jews regarded as a pagan recognized the true identity of Jesus. As the Scriptures record

“Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying,

Truly this was the Son of God.” Matthew 27:54

Was this Roman soldier saying this in any metaphorical sense? I would hardly think so. He knew exactly why the Jews had wanted Jesus crucified. He knew exactly who it was that they believed Jesus claimed to be. This is why he said “Truly this was the Son of God”. Regarding the words of the centurion Ellen White wrote

“These words were said in no whispered tones. All eyes were turned to see whence they came. Who had spoken? It was the centurion, the Roman soldier. The divine patience of the Saviour, and His sudden death, with the cry of victory upon His lips, had impressed this heathen. In the bruised, broken body hanging upon the cross, the centurion recognized the form of the Son of God. He could not refrain from confessing his faith. Thus again evidence was given that our Redeemer was to see of the travail of His soul. Upon the very day of His death, three men, differing widely from one another, had declared their faith, -- he who commanded the Roman guard, he who bore the cross of the Saviour, and he who died upon the cross at His side.” (*Ellen White, The Desire of Ages, page 770, ‘In Joseph’s tomb’, see also Spirit of Prophecy, Volume 3, ‘Calvary’, 1878*)

### **The purpose of John’s gospel**

John wrote his gospel just as the 1st century was drawing to a close. As I have said previously, this I believe was to refute the heresies that were then being attempted to be brought into the Christian Church. John gave his overall purpose for writing his gospel by saying

“And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.” John 20:31

The disputes that Jesus experienced with the Jews; the words that Jesus spoke to those He encountered (Jews and non-Jews); the miracles documented; the scenes of the death and resurrection of Jesus; were recorded by this beloved disciple to achieve the one end. It was to prove that Jesus was indeed the divine Son of God.

Please take very careful note of what I say next because it is very important.

There are some who say that the term Son of God (like the word begotten) is only with respect to the incarnation and the miracle birth but if this were true then John made a complete hash of His gospel. I say this because John was led to detail all the signs that show that Jesus is the Son of God (this is the whole point of his gospel) but he makes no reference to the virgin birth or the events at Bethlehem associated with the incarnation.

It should go without saying that under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit, John did not regard the events at Bethlehem as one of the signs that shows that Jesus is the divine Son of God. Again this is only reasonable biblical exegesis. There are also those who say that the words *only begotten* as applied to Christ are applicable only because of the events of the incarnation but as we can see, this claim would be the result of very poor scholarship.

Nowhere either in the Scriptures is the term *monogenes* (the only one of its kind caused to be) ever found applied to the incarnation. We have seen also that Ellen White said very clearly that Christ was begotten of His Father in eternity (see section five). We therefore must not follow the reasoning that begotten has application to the events of Bethlehem and the virgin birth etc. There is no evidence to support or foster such a belief. Even Mark wrote his gospel by beginning

“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” Mark 1:1

Like John the gospel writer, Mark never made any reference to the virgin birth or any of the events surrounding it. Obviously he was not led to believe this as crucial to understanding that Jesus is the divine Son of God.

### **The personal testimony of the Father**

The words that Jesus heard His Father speak at His baptism were very precious to Him. This was when the Saviour heard it said in an audible voice from Heaven

“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Mathew 3:17

What greater testimony could there be than this one? Will we believe it though? Will we take God at His word and believe that Christ really is His Son? We need to remember here that it was a disbelief in God’s word that brought about the first sin in the Garden of Eden. Ellen White said of these words

“These words of confirmation were given to inspire faith in those who witnessed the scene, and to strengthen the Saviour for His mission. Notwithstanding that the sins of a guilty world were laid upon Christ, notwithstanding the humiliation of taking upon Himself our fallen nature, the voice from heaven declared Him to be the Son of the Eternal.” (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, page 112, ‘The Baptism’*)

By “the Eternal”, Ellen White is referring to the Father. We shall see later that she very often referred to Him as the infinite God. This was in contrast to Jesus whom she often described as the Son of the infinite God (here “the Son of the Eternal”). Not only at the baptism of Jesus was the voice of the Father heard but also at the transfiguration. The Scriptures record

“While he [Peter] yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.” Matthew 17:5

It must therefore be exactly as Ellen White said

“The more we think about Christ's becoming a babe here on earth, the more wonderful it appears. How can it be that the helpless babe in Bethlehem's manger is still the divine Son of God?” (*Ellen G. White, The Youth's Instructor 21st November 1895*)

Notice her words regarding the baby Jesus. She said that it was wonderment that this child was “still the divine Son of God”. To anyone who is honestly seeking the truth, this must be overwhelming convincing that Ellen White believed that this baby, in His pre-existence, was the divine Son of God. How else is it possible to understand what she was saying here? Obviously she was not saying that He was the Son of God only because of the incarnation. She also said in 1905 concerning Christ

“In His incarnation He gained in a new sense the title of the Son of God. Said the angel to Mary, “The power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). While the Son of a human being, He became the Son of God in a new sense. Thus He stood in our world -- the Son of God, yet allied by birth to the human race. (*Ellen G. White, Selected Messages book 1 page 226 also Signs of the Times August 2nd 1905*)

Clearly Ellen White was in agreement with Scripture that Christ has always been the Son of God. This therefore was not a position to which He eventually achieved either at the incarnation or at the resurrection or at some other time during His earthly ministry (like adoptionism). It was one that He had held from the beginning with God His Father. This is why John began his gospel with the words

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” John 1:1

### **Current claims by the Seventh-day Adventist Church**

The claim of the Seventh-day Adventist Church today is that Christ, in His pre-existence, is not really the Son of God. This they say is because He is not begotten (sourced) of God. In fact they say that all references to Him being a Son is only metaphorical (figurative). As Woodrow Whidden puts it in the Seventh-day Adventist publication *The Trinity*

“Is it not quite apparent that the problem texts become problems only when one assumes an exclusively literalistic interpretation of such expressions as “Father,” “Son,” “Firstborn,” “Only Begotten,” “Begotten,” and so forth? Does not such literalism go against the mainly figurative or metaphorical meaning that the Bible writers use when referring to the persons of the Godhead?” (*Woodrow Whidden, The Trinity, ‘Biblical objections to the trinity’ page 106,*



2002)

Regarding the personalities of the Godhead, we are informed here of the official position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This is that the Father is not really a father whilst the Son is not really a son. This is totally contrary to what was believed by early Christians. It is also totally contrary to what was believed by early Seventh-day Adventists. It is also, as we have seen in this section, totally contrary to the evidence of the Scriptures and the writings of Ellen White. The claim here is that the terms Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all metaphorical (figurative). As we have seen from our studies of God's Word, this cannot be true. Whidden had earlier written

“Another important consideration involves how we interpret the Bible. Here the issue pertains to whether we should interpret some passages literally or whether we may treat them more figuratively. Maybe we could illustrate it this way. While we often refer to Jesus as the Son and frequently call the first person of the Godhead the Father, do we really want to take such expressions in a totally literal way? Or would it be more appropriate to interpret them in a more metaphorical way that draws on selective aspects of sonship and fatherhood?” (*Woodrow Whidden, The Trinity, page 94, 'Biblical objections to the trinity'*)

Here again it is being said that the terms used to describe the members of the Godhead are only used to denote “selective aspects” of a father/son relationship. In other words, the Father is not really a father, the Son is not really a son, and the Holy Spirit is not really a holy spirit. They are said to be just metaphorical terms. Whidden continues by saying

“For instance, if one wants to totally literalize “Father,” would this mean that there must be an eternal heavenly “Mother of God” (maybe the Holy Spirit)?

Another illustration or two should clarify the point. One anti-Trinitarian has accused Trinitarians of denying that Jesus is a “true” Son of God (he means literal), since they reject the idea that the Son was literally generated as a divine being (called Son) by God the Father. Of course he uses “generate” to mean to beget a son in the same sense that earthly fathers procreate. But if we employed the same type of literal interpretation, since Jesus in John 15:1 clearly claims that He is the “true vine,” must we then literally understand Jesus to be a grapevine? Most obviously, Jesus is here speaking figuratively or illustratively. Could it be the same case with the expressions “Father” and “Son”? (*Ibid*)

Many would regard Whidden's words as an attempt to ridicule (deride) those who believe that the Son is truly begotten of the Father. If this is true, this would not only be ridiculing the anti-trinitarians but also the trinitarians as well, at least those who believe that the Son is begotten. These would include of course all those who believe the orthodox trinity doctrine to be true. This is because the

orthodox version is totally dependant on the Son being begotten of the Father. It would also mean ridiculing the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism, including Ellen White. This is because they all believed that Christ is God's true Son.

### **Literal or figurative?**

So how do we know whether something in the Scriptures should be taken literally or figuratively?

I have always maintained that unless something is obviously figurative, like Jesus referring to Himself as the living bread or as a door or even a vine (see John 6:51, John 10:7, John 15:5), it should be taken literally. Obviously trees do not clap their hands (see Isaiah 55:12). In most cases it is not too difficult to differentiate between the literal and the figurative. This is unless we are talking in terms of prophecy and then at times it does become that much more difficult.

This question as to "how we interpret the Bible" (see Whidden's remarks above), whether it be literally or figuratively, has been answered very clearly by Ellen White

"It is the first and highest duty of every rational being to learn from the Scriptures what is truth, and then to walk in the light and encourage others to follow his example. We should day by day study the Bible diligently, weighing every thought and comparing scripture with scripture. With divine help we are to form our opinions for ourselves as we are to answer for ourselves before God.

The truths most plainly revealed in the Bible have been involved in doubt and darkness by learned men, who, with a pretense of great wisdom, teach that the Scriptures have a mystical, a secret, spiritual meaning not apparent in the language employed. These men are false teachers. It was to such a class that Jesus declared: "Ye know not the Scriptures, neither the power of God." Mark 12:24" (*Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy, page 598, 'The Scriptures a safeguard'*)

This is obviously very relevant to our present study. Ellen White then explained

"The language of the Bible should be explained according to its obvious meaning, unless a symbol or figure is employed. Christ has given the promise: "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine." John 7:17. If men would but take the Bible as it reads, if there were no false teachers to mislead and confuse their minds, a work would be accomplished that would make angels glad and that would bring into the fold of Christ thousands upon thousands who are now wandering in error." (*Ibid*)

In keeping with this counsel from the spirit of prophecy, we must ask ourselves if the term Son of God, as we have seen it for ourselves as applied to Christ in the Scriptures, also in the writings of Ellen White, should be taken literally or

figuratively. We need therefore to do some sanctified reasoning together.

When God said in His own voice that Jesus was His Son, why should those who heard Him not have taken Him literally? We must also ask the same of Jesus Himself. He said very clearly that He was the Son of God. Did He not mean it literally? If not, why not?

The reason why I ask this is because it was His profession that caused such a stir amongst the Jews. In fact it was what led Him to be crucified. Jesus would not have caused unnecessary uproar. The Jews obviously believed He meant it literally. This is why they said He had blasphemed and made Himself equal with God. They even said that by calling Himself the Son of God He was making Himself God. This is why they wanted Him put to death. Are we to believe that they misunderstood what Jesus was saying and that He did not correct them? As we have seen, Ellen White said that they understood perfectly who Jesus was claiming to be (see above).

Some say that the phrase Son of God is only representative of the love that the Son has for the Father and vice versa etc (see Whidden's remarks above). This does not make any sense at all. Why should this have brought about such a violent reaction from the Jews? Why would that make them want to kill Him?

What about the demons and even the devil himself, also those that mocked Him at the cross? They all called Jesus the Son of God. In fact this is why His accusers said He deserved to die. They said that by these claims He was claiming to be equal with God. Obviously none of these were using this term to show the love that the Father and Son have for each other. They obviously believed Christ meant it literally. To believe that the demons and even the devil himself used the term Son of God to show the love between God and Christ is to reason to the point of absolute absurdity.

There is something else important to remember here. We noted above that Whidden said when referring to terminologies such as Father and Son (note the emphasis)

*“Far from suggesting that the Father generated or begat the Son as some sort of derived or created semigod, the imagery of Father and Son points to the eternal and profound intimacy that has always existed between the first and second persons of the Godhead as divine “equals” through all eternity (past, present, and future).” (Woodrow Whidden, *The Trinity*, page 97 ‘Biblical objections to the trinity’)*

*“Does not such literalism go against the mainly figurative or metaphorical meaning that the Bible writers use when referring to the persons of the Godhead?” (Ibid page 106)*

We need to do some more reasoning together here.

Whidden is saying that it was the “Bible writers” who had selected such terms as Father and Son but he is leading his readers to reason incorrectly. I say this because he makes it look as though the writers of the Scriptures had chosen these terminologies when in reality they did not choose them at all. The words Father and Son were the words that others had used when referring to Christ. Putting this in another way, the Bible writers were simply recording what others **had actually said**. They were not just choosing words for themselves. This was when the Father called Jesus His Son, the Son called God His Father and the demons called Jesus the Son of God etc. It was also when Jesus referred to Himself as the Son of God, as did the disciples and others.

The terms Father and Son therefore were not words selected by the Bible writers to describe the loving relationship between these two (which is what Whidden is saying above) but were ***the actual words that others used*** when referring to God and Christ. This included the words that God and Christ had actually spoken. This is obviously very important. It must not be overlooked.

When everything is taken into account (weighing up all the evidence), we must ask if the term Son of God is to be taken literally or figuratively? I believe the answer to be obvious. By the weight of evidence that we find in the Scriptures, (also in the writings of Ellen White) also if we are to remain honest in our deliberations, we must take it literally. Jesus really is the Son of God and God really is His Father. As Ellen White said in 1904

“God is the Father of Christ; Christ is the Son of God. To Christ has been given an exalted position. He has been made equal with the Father. All the counsels of God are opened to His Son.” (*Ellen G. White, 8th Volume Testimonies, page 268, ‘The Essential Knowledge’*)

### **The Son of the infinite God**

It was said previously that we would bring quotations from the spirit of prophecy saying that Christ is the Son of the infinite God. Whilst they cannot all be quoted here, we shall indulge just a few. Note that they all speak of Christ being a son before He vacated heaven and exiled Himself from His Father. These are such as

“It was necessary that the Son of the infinite God should come to be the light of the world, to be the fountain of healing mercy to a lost race.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 20th January 1891, ‘Co-operation with Christ’*)

“The One appointed in the counsels of heaven came to the earth as an instructor. He was no less a being than the Creator of the world, the Son of the Infinite God.” (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies on Education, page 173, 1897*)

The Son is here spoken of as being a son in His pre-existence, meaning prior to

Him coming to earth. Note Ellen White refers to the Father as “the infinite God” thus clearly delineating between these two divine personalities. She also wrote these words

“The Son of the infinite God came to this earth, and honoured it with His presence.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 6th June 1907, ‘No other Gods before me’*)

“The deep necessity of man for a divine teacher was known in heaven. The pity and sympathy of God were exercised in behalf of man, fallen and bound to Satan's chariot car; and when the fulness of time was come, he sent forth his Son. The One appointed in the counsels of heaven came to the earth as an instructor. He was no less a being than the Creator of the world, the Son of the Infinite God. The rich benevolence of God gave him to our world; and to meet the necessities of humanity, he took on him human nature.” (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies on education, page 173, 1897*)

“Although the only begotten Son of the infinite God humbled Himself, and took upon Him humanity, yet, under trial and test, his faith was equal to the proving of temptation on behalf of humanity. Jesus passed over the ground upon which Adam had fallen, and his feet did not stumble. Satan left the field a vanquished foe, peremptorily dismissed.” (*Ellen G. White, Bible Echo, 1st December 1893, Victory in temptation through Christ*)

“Was not Christ the greatest teacher the world ever knew? Was He not the Son of the infinite God? and yet He said, “I do nothing of Myself.” “Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of Myself, but My Father which dwelleth in Me, He doeth the work.”” (*Ellen G. White, Bible Echo, 18th September 1899, Letter from Ellen White when in Australia to the shareholders*)

Many more statements could be quoted from Ellen White showing that she believed that Christ, prior to coming to earth, truly was the “Son of the Infinite God” but one more will suffice here for our purposes. This is when she wrote in 1891

“The Son of the infinite God, the Lord of life and glory, descended in humiliation to the life of the lowliest, that no one might feel himself excluded from his presence. He made himself accessible to all. He did not select a favored few with whom to associate and ignore all others. It grieves the Spirit of God when conservatism shuts man away from his fellow-man, especially when it is found among those who profess to be his children.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 22nd December 1891, ‘No caste in Christ’*)

### **Further witness**

Apart from the places we have already noted, there are many more verses of Scripture where Jesus is referred to as the Son of God. Whilst there are too

many to include here, suffice to note that some are Acts 9:20, Romans 1:4, 2 Corinthians 1:19, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 4:13, Hebrews 4:14, 6:6, 7:3, 10:29 and Revelation 2:18. This is besides where John in his first letter says nine times that Christ is the Son of God.

Perhaps two of the latter we need to quote here. They are obviously very important. John wrote these when heresies were in abundance concerning Christ. The first says

“Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” 1 John 5:5

As we noted above (Peter’s confession), this is the essence of the Christian faith. It is the belief that Jesus is the divine Son of God. According to the Word of God, this is the faith that overcomes. John also wrote

“He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.” 1 John 5:10

The testimony of the Scripture through and through is that Christ is truly the Son of God. This is the witness that all those who belong to God have in him or her self.

Before summarising this section, I would quote you one more experience from Scripture. This was Philip’s encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch.

The Scriptures tell us that the Spirit led this disciple to the Ethiopians chariot. He asked the Ethiopian if he understood what he was reading (Isaiah chapter 53) but the reply he received was that he could not understand without someone to help him. The Ethiopian asked Philip as to whom it was that this passage of Scripture was referring and Philip began to preach to him concerning Christ. The Scriptures then tell us

“And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” Acts 8:36-38

This was the confession of early Christianity. It was that which the apostle Paul preached in the synagogues immediately following His miraculous conversion (Acts 9:20). It was and still is today, that Jesus is indeed “the Son of God”. Today we are faced with the temptation to believe that Christ is not really the Son of God. By specious reasoning, some of today’s theologians, even Seventh-day Adventist theologians, are saying that He is not a true Son. This is no different than the temptation that Jesus faced when He was here on earth. As Ellen White wrote regarding Satan taking Him up into a high mountain and promising Him the

kingdoms of this world

“But Christ saw that which Satan tried to veil from his eyes, and that which he flattered himself he had done. Christ had not exchanged his divinity for humanity; but he had clothed his divinity in humanity, and he gave Satan the evidence for which he had asked, -- showed him that he was the Son of God.” (*Ellen G. White, Review & Herald. 29th October 1895*)

### **In summary**

In summary, it must not be said that Christ is the Son of God only in a metaphorical (figurative) sense. The evidence is totally overwhelming that His pre-existent Sonship should be taken literally. If we do not take it literally, then I truly believe that we shall be at variance with both the testimony of the Scriptures and the testimony of Jesus as He spoke through Ellen White.

“The Father did not yield up his dearly beloved Son without a struggle, whether to let guilty man perish or to give his Son to die for the lost race. It was impossible for God to change his law, or give up the smallest part of its claims, in order to save man; therefore he suffered his Son to die for man's transgression.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 30th January 1879, 'The great controversy: The plan of salvation'*)

In 1908, ten years after *The Desire of Ages* was published, Ellen White wrote

“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. But "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." O, the mystery of redemption! the love of God for a world that did not love Him! Who can know the depths of that love which "passeth knowledge"? Through endless ages, immortal minds, seeking to comprehend the mystery of that incomprehensible love, will wonder and adore.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 4th November 1908, 'When sin entered', see also Patriarchs and Prophets, 'The plan of redemption, page 63, 1890*)

As we close this section, here is something to ponder that I believe is very important.

When God laid Moses in the dust, it was not His purpose that His servant should remain in the grave. Moses had been a faithful servant of God. Christ raised him to life even before his body saw corruption. Satan was angry and he received a rebuke.

“Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said,

The Lord rebuke thee.” Jude 1:9

Ellen White in commenting on this wrote

“Moses passed through death, but Michael came down and gave him life before his body had seen corruption. Satan tried to hold the body, claiming it as his; but Michael resurrected Moses and took him to heaven.” (*Ellen G. White, Early Writings, Spiritual Gifts, page 164, 1882, see also Signs of the Times, 31st March 1881, ‘The death of Moses, also Spiritual Gifts Volume 1, 1858, also Spiritual Gifts 4A 1864, also Spirit of Prophecy Volume 1 1870*)

It was “Michael” (Christ) that raised Moses from the grave but notice Ellen White’s next words (this is the part I said was important).

“Satan railed bitterly against God, denouncing Him as unjust in permitting his prey to be taken from him; but Christ did not rebuke His adversary, though it was through his temptation that the servant of God had fallen.” (*Ibid*)

So if Christ (Michael) did not rebuke Satan then who did?

“He [Christ] meekly referred him to His Father, saying, "The Lord rebuke thee." (*Ibid*)

Here we are talking in terms of over **1400 years before the incarnation** and Christ, like a humble Son, does not rebuke Satan Himself but refers him instead to His Father. Is there any real need to say any more?

Perhaps just one more statement from the spirit of prophecy will suffice.

Throughout His earthy life, Jesus would not succumb to temptation. As an obedient Son, He waited for His Father to tell Him what to do. This was in total harmony as it was in His pre-existence. Nothing in this respect had changed. As Ellen White said when referring to Christ’s temptation in the wilderness (note that Ellen White penned these words after the publication of *The Desire of Ages*)

“Christ’s time to show His divine power had not yet come. He was fully aware of the glory He had with the Father before the world was. But then [in His pre-existence] He willingly submitted to the Divine will, and He was unchanged now [during the temptation].” (*Ellen G. White, Bible Echo, 23rd July 1900 ‘Tempted in all points’, see also The Youth’s Instructor, 3rd January 1901, ‘Tempted in all points’*)

In His pre-existence Christ was an obedient Son. So too He was in His life on earth. This is how He earned the right to be the Saviour of mankind. It was through faith in His Father.



We shall now go to section seven. Here we shall see that whilst Christ is truly begotten of the Father therefore truly a son, His existence as a son cannot be measured by any means known to humanity. All that can be said is that He has existed from the days of eternity, hence the title of the section, Begotten in eternity.

## **The Begotten Series**

### **Section seven**

#### **Begotten in eternity**

In part one of these theological studies we dealt mainly with the New Testament Greek word *monogenes*. This is the word that in the KJV and other translations of the Bible is often translated begotten. In previous sections we have noted that Christ is God Himself begotten yet a separate individual personality from the Father. In this section we shall be taking particular note of an Old Testament verse of Scripture that refers to Christ's pre-existence (the coming Messiahs pre-existence). This verse is Micah 5:2 The KJV renders this verse this way (note what is underscored)

“But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.” Micah 5:2 KJV

#### **An understanding of Micah 5:2**

It must be admitted that as found in Micah 5:2 (KJV), the words “from everlasting” certainly give the impression that the one who was coming (the Messiah) is not begotten. This is an understandable first impression but when we dig a little deeper we begin to see more in this verse of Scripture than was probably first realised.

In Micah 5:2 (KJV), as in other places in the Old Testament, the Hebrew word that is translated everlasting (*owlam* or *olam*) does not actually mean forever. It actually means time out of mind or the vanishing point (i.e. that which is hidden from human understanding). It also has as its root a word that literally means hidden or concealed. This same Hebrew word *owlam* suggests, as we would say today, sometime so far back in eternity that it is beyond human understanding. It is just like saying that which is beyond the horizon, something that cannot be seen, time out of mind or beyond human comprehension. As Fernando Canale admits in the official Seventh-day Adventist declaration of their doctrine of God

“When the idea of eternity is searched in the Biblical record, however, the first facet that comes into view is that the words usually translated “eternity” have a clear, temporal meaning.” (*Fernando Canale, Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia, Volume 12, page 109, ‘The doctrine of God’*)

Canale admits here that in the Bible, the concept of “eternity” is not forever. He then adds

“In the OT *‘olam* and in the NT *aion* basically mean “a long time or duration” referring to a limited or unlimited period of time.” (*Ibid*)

This is very interesting. It certainly is a different impression from the KJV rendering of this word (everlasting). Note how the New International Version quotes Micah 5:2.

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.” Micah 5:2 New International Version

Interesting to note also is that with reference to the part of this verse in question, the New International has as a footnote that says

“Or from days of eternity” (footnote to Micah 5:2 New International Version)

This is exactly the same as the KJV has in its margin notes.

Other versions that translate the latter part of Micah 5:2 as different to the KJV (“from everlasting”) are as follows

“... from old, from the days of eternity.” Greens Literal Translation

"... from long ago, From the days of eternity." New American Standard

“... from the beginning, from the days of eternity.” Douay-Rheims Translation

“... whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.” Revised Standard Version

“... whose origins go back to the distant past.” The New Jerusalem Bible (1985)

“... one whose roots are far back in the past, in days gone by” The New English Bible

“... His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity.” New American Standard

“... His origin is from antiquity, from eternity.” Holman Christian Standard Bible

“... whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.” English Standard version

“... He comes from very old times, from days long ago.” New Century version

“... whose origins are far in the past, back in ancient times.” The Complete Jewish Bible

“... whose origin is from early times, from the days of time indefinite” New World Translation

The latter words “from the days of time indefinite”, do appear to give one of the best English renderings of the Hebrew *owlam* which, as has been said already, conveys the thought of time out of mind. It is no wonder therefore that on a number of occasions when speaking specifically of the pre-existence of Christ, Ellen White quoted that His origins was from the days of eternity. This is when she wrote in *The Desire of Ages*

“Silence fell upon the vast assembly. The name of God, given to Moses to express the idea of the eternal presence, had been claimed as His own by this Galilean Rabbi. He had announced Himself to be the self-existent One, He who had been promised to Israel, "whose goings forth have been from of old, from the days of eternity." Micah 5:2, margin. (*Ellen White, The Desire of Ages, page 469, 'The light of Life'*)

She had also said earlier in the book (speaking of Mary the mother of Jesus)

“She is of the lineage of David, and the Son of David must be born in David's city. Out of Bethlehem, said the prophet, "shall He come forth . . . that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from the days of eternity." Micah 5:2, margin.” (*Ellen G. White, 'The Desire of Ages, page 47, 'Unto you a Saviour', 1898*)

Twice in *The Desire of Ages* when quoting Micah 5:2, Ellen White quoted from the KJV but instead of using the words “from everlasting” (as used in the KJV text) she used the margin notes “from the days of eternity”. She also did the same in *Prophets and Kings*.

“The Son of David must be born in David's city. Out of Bethlehem, said the prophet, "shall He come forth ... that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from the days of eternity." Micah 5:2, margin.” (*Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings, page 697, 'The coming of a Deliverer'*)

Needless to say, Ellen White must have had a very good reason for doing this because if she wanted to depict the existence of Christ as never having a beginning (coeternal) as in the trinity doctrine, then what better choice of words could be used from the English language than “from everlasting”? As it was

though, on these occasions, she did not use them. As has been said, there must have been a very good reason for her not doing it.

We have already seen in this Begotten Series that Ellen White did believe that Christ is literally begotten of the Father so this is not in question. We shall see this again later in this section. For further comments regarding Ellen White and the begotten concept see section five. See also section fifteen in the detailed history series here

[A Detailed History of the Trinity Doctrine](#)

### **E. J. Waggoner and his message at Minneapolis**

Most Seventh-day Adventists are well aware that 1888 was a watershed year within Seventh-day Adventism. This was the year when at the Minneapolis General Conference, Ellet Waggoner (Joseph Waggoner's son), delivered a message that Ellen White thoroughly endorsed. His book *Christ and His Righteousness* (1890) depicts this message. Ellen White may not have endorsed every aspect of Waggoner's message but she certainly agreed with his begotten theology.

### **Ellet Waggoner's begotten theology**

Waggoner's Godhead theology was in keeping with what was then believed by Seventh-day Adventists. This theology was that in His pre-existence, Christ was truly the begotten Son of God, meaning that He was a true Son and truly God in the highest sense of its meaning. By quoting from his book, we shall now take a look at some of the conclusions that Waggoner drew. This was the faith of Seventh-day Adventists whilst Ellen White was alive. No one, not even Ellen White, had any objections to this aspect of Waggoner's message. With regards to Psalm 45:6 where it says, "Thy throne O God, is forever and ever," Waggoner comments (this is in the section "Is Christ God?")

"The casual reader might take this to be simply the Psalmist's ascription of praise to God, but when we turn to the New Testament, we find that it is much more. We find that God the Father is the speaker and that He is addressing the Son, calling Him God. See Heb. 1:1- 8

This name was not given to Christ in consequence of some great achievement but it is His by right of inheritance. Speaking of the power and greatness of Christ, the writer to the Hebrews says that He is made so much better than the angels, because "He hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they." Heb. 1:4. "A son always rightfully takes the name of the father; and Christ, as "the only begotten Son of God," has rightfully the same name. A son, also, is, to a greater or less degree, a reproduction of the father; he has to some extent the features and personal characteristics of his father; not perfectly, because there is no perfect reproduction among mankind. But there is no imperfection in God, or in any

of His works, and so Christ is the “express image” of the Father’s person. Heb. 1:3. As the Son of the self - existent God, He has by nature all the attributes of Deity.” (*E. J. Waggoner, Christ and His righteousness, pages 11-12, ‘Is Christ God?, 1890*)

Reiterating the point that Christ is a begotten Son and not a created being Waggoner made clear

“But the point is that Christ is a begotten Son and not a created subject. He has by inheritance a more excellent name than the angels. He is “a Son over His own house.” Heb. 1:4; 3:6. And since He is the only-begotten Son of God, He is of the very substance and nature of God, and possesses by birth all the attributes of God; for the Father was pleased that His Son should be the express image of His person, the brightness of His glory, and filled with all the fullness of the Godhead. So He has “life in Himself;” He possesses immortality in His own right, and can confer immortality on others. Life inheres in Him, so that it cannot be taken from Him; but, having voluntarily laid it down, He can take it again.” (*Ibid page 22, ‘Is Christ a created being?’*)

This is the begotten view of Christ. This makes Christ God Himself. Waggoner considered Christ to be no one less than Jehovah. We know this because on the next page of his book he said

“Christ “is in the bosom of the Father;” being by nature the very substance of God and having life in Himself, He is properly called Jehovah, the self existing one and is thus styled in Jer. 23:56, where it is said that the righteous Branch, who shall execute judgment and justice in the earth, shall be known by the name of Jehovah-tsidekenu -- THE LORD, OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.” (*Ibid page 23*)

Notice Waggoner’s remarks about Christ being what he terms “the self existing one”. Ellen White made very much the same comment. To make sure that there was not seen in his message a confusion of personalities, Waggoner had previously said (this is in the section Christ as Creator)

“A word of caution may be necessary here. Let no one imagine that we would exalt Christ at the expense of the Father or would ignore the Father. That cannot be, for their interests are one. We honor the Father in honoring the Son. We are mindful of Paul’s words, that “to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him” (1 Cor. 8:6); just as we have already quoted, that it was by Him that God made the worlds. (*Ibid page 19, ‘Christ as Creator’*)

Waggoner then added with respect to God the Father being the source of everything including the Son

“All things proceed ultimately from God, the Father; even Christ Himself proceeded and came forth from the Father, but it has pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell, and that He should be the direct, immediate Agent in every act of creation. Our object in this investigation is to set forth Christ's rightful position of equality with the Father, in order that His power to redeem may be the better appreciated.” (*Ibid*)

Just like Ellen White and the other pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism, even though they said that the Son is begotten of God, Waggoner maintained that He was equal with God and was God. This was in harmony with what the Scriptures say at John 1:1 etc. Even though Seventh-day Adventists maintained that Christ was begotten of God, they did not depict Him as a lesser person than God (or a lesser god). They regarded Him as God Himself in a separate form (separate personality) from the Father.

In the section *Is Christ God?*, Waggoner also said (please note this statement well because we shall be returning our thoughts to it later)

“It is true that there are many sons of God, but Christ is the "only begotten Son of God," and therefore the Son of God in a sense in which no other being ever was or ever can be. The angels are sons of God, as was Adam (Job 38:7; Luke 3:38), by creation; Christians are the sons of God by adoption (Rom. 8:14, 15), but Christ is the Son of God by birth. The writer to the Hebrews further shows that the position of the Son of God is not one to which Christ has been elevated but that it is one which He has by right.” (*Ibid page 12 'Is Christ God?'*)

In a very small nutshell, this was the preponderant 1890s faith of Seventh-day Adventists. It was a faith that said that Christ is truly God not only because the Scriptures refer to Him as God but also that He is begotten of the Father. So it was that the Son was said to be God essentially. All of this was in a non-trinitarian framework.

At Minneapolis (1888) there were many antagonisms to Waggoner's message but this was with respect to what he said concerning the relationship of the law to grace. These antagonisms therefore came under the heading of righteousness by faith. Never were there complaints that his view of Christ as the begotten Son of God was in error. This is because it was in keeping with what Seventh-day Adventists then believed.

We shall now take a look and see how Ellen White regarded this begotten Son of God faith. This should broaden our picture of early Seventh-day Adventism.

### **A begotten Son**

It is a well-known fact within Seventh-day Adventism that because of her lack of writing skills, Ellen White was constantly saddened that all too often she could not find the correct words to adequately express what God had shown her. This

is why at times she took someone else's writings (what was said on a particular subject) and then modified it (if necessary) to suit what God had revealed to her. I believe that we shall see a prime example of this now.

After the 1888 Minneapolis Conference, Ellen White toured America with both Waggoner and Jones. Together they preached the Minneapolis message at many of the larger churches and camp meetings. In 1891 the church split them up. Ellen White was sent to Australia whilst Waggoner was sent here to England. As you may know, Ellen White later wrote to the conference saying that God had nothing to do with her being sent to Australia – but that's another story.

We now need to consider a statement made in 1895 by Ellen White. We have viewed this statement before but it is important to review it here. In the *Signs of the Times* and in writing as to why Christ is truly the divine Son of God she said

“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, 'Christ our complete salvation'*)

Here we are told, through the spirit of prophecy, that Christ is the Son of God not because He was created (as are angels), not because He was adopted (as are Christians) but because He was “begotten in the express image of His Father's person”. This is with reference to Hebrews 1:3. This is speaking in terms of Christ's pre-existence, not to the incarnation or resurrection.

Now compare Ellen White's statement with this one in Waggoner's book *Christ and His Righteousness*. How much difference is there between the two? Waggoner had said (we noted this above)

“It is true that there are many sons of God, but Christ is the "only begotten Son of God," and therefore the Son of God in a sense in which no other being ever was or ever can be. The angels are sons of God, as was Adam (Job 38:7; Luke 3:38), by creation; Christians are the sons of God by adoption (Rom. 8:14, 15), but Christ is the Son of God by birth. The writer to the Hebrews further shows that the position of the Son of God is not one to which Christ has been elevated but that it is one which He has by right.” (*Christ and His righteousness, page 12 'Is Christ God?', 1890*)

It is only reasonable to believe that Ellen White used and modified what Waggoner had written here. It is even more reasonable to believe that she totally agreed with **what** he had written, meaning that she totally agreed that Christ was indeed begotten of the Father. Whilst Ellen White avoided the use of the word *birth*, she did, like Waggoner, emphasise the begotten concept as the origins of

Christ. This cannot be denied. She was not just saying that Christ was unique like many of our pro-trinitarians today say that the word begotten means. This could not be reasoned from the way that she here used the word begotten. Like Waggoner, Ellen White was talking here in terms of origins, meaning **why** Christ is termed a Son. If she was not doing this, then the entire statement does not make any sense.

If it is not thought that Ellen White did literally mean begotten, then regarding this same concept we only need to read a statement she made just six weeks later. This is when she wrote

“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’*)

Here we can see that instead of using the word begotten to explain Christ’s source of being (this is as a separate personality from the Father), Ellen White says that He was “made in the express image” of his Father’s person. Again this is with reference to Hebrews 1:3. In the first statement she said “begotten in the express image of the Father’s person” whilst in the second she said “made in the express image of his person”. In this case she regarded the word begotten synonymous with made. This leaves us to conclude that just as did Ellet Waggoner, Ellen White certainly regarded the Son (as a separate personality from the infinite or living God) as having His origins in the Father (being sourced of the Father). This is why she maintained that He is God essentially. We noted this in section five. We shall see this again in section nine.

It must also be admitted that Ellen White regarded the “Eternal Father”, the unchangeable one” as the very same personality as “the living God” (compare her statements above)

These “begotten” and “made” statements were made by Ellen White just as the 20th century was drawing to a close. This means that by this time this she had been a messenger of the Lord for over 50 years and was drawing upon that same amount of revelation from God. We need to remember here also that she was an inspired writer.

### **A true Son**

Apart from the begotten concept, there are a multitude of statements could be quoted from Ellen White to show that she believed that Christ, in His pre-existence, was truly the Son of God. One such statement was in the year 1900. This was 2 years **after** the publication of *The Desire of Ages*.

“Christ has definitely pointed out our work; for He Himself, the Son of the living God, stooped to uplift the fallen. By pledges and words of assurance He



sought to win to Himself the poor, the lost, the suffering. Human beings are precious in the sight of the Lord." (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 30th May 1900, 'Go, work today in my vineyard'*)

After saying that it is strange that we "regard so lightly those for whom Christ has died" (which was the entire point of her article) she then said

"Our work is to be done for the love of Christ and for the love of the beings that the Lord loved so much that He gave His only-begotten Son to die for them." (*Ibid*)

Another such statement was in 1903. This was now **5 years after** the publication of *The Desire of Ages* (note very carefully how she describes Christ)

"If it were not for the light that is given us from above, we could not follow step by step in the footprints of Jesus. Christ came to this world in order that we might have this light. He is "the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." He, the Majesty of heaven, the Son of the living God, the One equal with the Father, came to our world to stand by the side of fallen beings, through His sacrifice giving value to humanity." (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the times 3rd June 1903, 'Walk in the light'*)

Note Ellen White refers to Christ as "the Son of the living God". There can be no mistake she was here referring to His pre-existent status. In 1907, Ellen White was still referring to Christ, in His pre-existence, as being a son. This was now **9 years after** the publication of *The Desire of Ages*. Note the title of the article

"The Son of the infinite God came to this earth, and honoured it with His presence." (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 6th June 1907, 'No other Gods before me'*)

She refers to the "living God" (see above) as the "infinite God". Again she stresses that Christ is the "Son of". All of the previously quoted statements of Ellen White speak of Christ as being a Son **before** He came to earth. A vast number like these can be found. In summary of them all we can quote her as saying

"In His incarnation He [Christ] gained in a new sense the title of the Son of God. Said the angel to Mary, "The power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). While the Son of a human being, He became the Son of God in a new sense. Thus He stood in our world -- the Son of God, yet allied by birth to the human race." (*Ellen G. White, Selected Messages book 1 page 226 also Signs of the Times August 2nd 1905*)

This becoming the Son of God "in a new sense" is obviously in contrast to the old sense, which was as He was before coming to earth. In other words, Ellen

White was saying, that whilst Christ was the Son of God before He came to earth, He became the Son of God in a “new sense” at the incarnation. She had also said in 1895

“The more we think about Christ's becoming a babe here on earth, the more wonderful it appears. How can it be that the helpless babe in Bethlehem's manger is still the divine Son of God?” (*Ellen G. White, The Youth's Instructor 21st November 1895, 'Child life of Jesus No. 1)*

Ellen White always spoke of Christ as though He was “still” the pre-existent divine Son of God. This was even though He had become flesh. Again this shows us that she believed He was the Son of God prior to coming to earth. This was in a non-trinitarian framework of theology.

### **Begotten in eternity - Waggoner**

Note here something else that is very interesting. In his book *Christ and His Righteousness*, Ellet Waggoner had written

The Word was “in the beginning”. The mind of man cannot grasp the ages that are spanned in this phrase.” (*E. J. Waggoner, 'Christ and His Righteousness', page 9, 'How shall we consider Christ?' 1890)*

Then, with respect to how and when the Son of God was begotten of His Father Waggoner said

“It is not given to men to know when or how the Son was begotten; but we know that He was the Divine Word, not simply before He came to this earth to die, but even before the world was created.... We know that Christ “proceeded forth and come from God” (John 8:42) but it was so far back in the ages of eternity as to be far beyond the grasp of the mind of man.” (*Ibid*)

In these statements, Ellet Waggoner denies the trinity doctrine. This is no matter which version it may be. This is because all versions of the trinity say that the three personalities are coeval, meaning of the same age (co-eternal). If they did not say this then they would not be truly trinitarian doctrines. He also said on page 21

“The Scriptures declare that Christ is "the only begotten son of God." He is begotten, not created. As to when He was begotten, it is not for us to inquire, nor could our minds grasp it if we were told. The prophet Micah tells us all that we can know about it in these words, "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from the days of eternity." Micah 5:2, margin.” (*Ibid, page 21 'Is Christ a created being?'*)

As regards to both these references to Micah 5:2, Waggoner does not use the words “from everlasting” as in the KJV text but uses instead the margin notes “from the days of eternity”. This was in keeping with what Seventh-day Adventists then believed. They did not believe, as in the trinity doctrine, that Christ is coeternal with the Father (meaning from forever or everlasting). Notice something else that is very important here. With respect to when Christ was begotten, Waggoner said that what was said in Micah 5:2 is “all that we can know about it”. He then said

“There was a time when Christ proceeded forth and came from God, from the bosom of the Father (John 8:42; 1:18), but that time was so far back in the days of eternity that to finite comprehension it is practically without beginning” (*Ibid page 21 and 22*)

Again we see Waggoner using the phrase “days of eternity”. Notice how he stresses that this happening is so long ago that it is “practically without beginning”. This is as far as Waggoner could go without saying that it forever (from everlasting). Note that Waggoner wrote this in 1890 (it is said to be his 1888 Minneapolis message). He then added in confirmation

“But the point is that Christ is a begotten Son and not a created subject.” (*Ibid page 22*)

Waggoner maintained that somewhere in eternity, so far back that it was impossible for the human mind to comprehend it, Christ was begotten (brought forth) of God. Waggoner was therefore expressing very clearly the belief that there was a time when the Son, as a separate personality from God the Father, had not been brought forth of God.

### **Begotten in eternity – Ellen White**

**In my 8 years of study on this subject, I have never found anywhere where Ellen White actually said this as pointedly as did Waggoner but I must also say that I cannot find anywhere either where she actually said as pointedly that there never was a time when the Son, as a separate personality from the Father, did not have an existence, although admittedly some statements she made can easily be interpreted as such. When compared though with other things she said concerning Christ they do take on a different shade of meaning (different nuances).**

**Orthodox trinity reasoning is completely denied by current Seventh-day Adventist theology. Seventh-day Adventists today insist that Christ, in His pre-existence, is definitely not begotten and therefore was not, in His pre-existence, a son. They also say that because He is one of three unbegotten divine personalities in the one being of God (the trinity) He is coeternal with the other two. We shall see this in section ten.**

This coeternal reasoning does not seem to best fit this next statement of Ellen

White. This is when she said with reference 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’*)

Note that Ellen White said this the year following the publication of *The Desire of Ages*. Here we can see it said that with regards to the personality of the Son (this is as a separate personality from the Father) His pre-existent life is immeasurable, at least by any means known to humanity. This is much the same view as held by Waggoner when he said that the mind of man could not “grasp the ages” that were spanned in the phrase “In the beginning” of John 1:1. It also parallels where he says that this begetting “was so far back in the days of eternity that to finite comprehension it is practically without beginning” (see above). Ellen White’s statement therefore is only another way of expressing the very same thoughts as Waggoner although maybe not as pointedly.

It appears therefore that with respect to **when** Christ was begotten of God, both Waggoner and Ellen White believed the same. This was that He was begotten at some point in eternity, entirely unknown and incomprehensible to the human mind. Did Ellen White copy what Waggoner had written in his book? Whatever our answer may be, we can say that she certainly emulated his thoughts.

Shortly following the Minneapolis General Conference session, Ellen White preached a sermon in which she said

“Angels of God looked with amazement upon Christ, who took upon Himself the form of man and humbly united His divinity with humanity in order that He might minister to fallen man. It is a marvel among the heavenly angels. God has told us that He did do it, and we are to accept the Word of God just as it reads.

And although we may try to reason in regard to our Creator, how long He has had existence, where evil first entered into our world, and all these things, we may reason about them until we fall down faint and exhausted with the research when there is yet an infinity beyond.” (*Ellen G. White, Sermon, December 1st 1888, The Des Moines Seventh-day Adventist Church, Iowa, ‘The minister’s relationship to God’s Word’, Sermons and talks, Volume 1 page 65*)

From the context, when Ellen White spoke of “our Creator” and “how long He has had existence” she was referring here to Christ, not to God the Father. Some may disagree with this reasoning. Whatever way this latter statement is viewed, there can be no doubt that Ellen White believed that Christ, in His pre-

existence, is a begotten Son but if she had believed (as expressed by the orthodox trinity doctrine) that He is eternally begotten of the Father, then this would have been the place to say it but she did not. Instead she simply maintained that His pre-existent life “could not be reckoned by human computation” and that it “is not measured by figures”. This she said in 1899.

It is quite apparent that in making this statement, Ellen White was not depicting a trinitarian view of the pre-existent Son of God, yet this was written by her the year following the publication of *The Desire of Ages* (1898). This is the book that Seventh-day Adventists today say led their church to become trinitarian. It is quite apparent that by then (1898/1899) she had not changed her views from the begotten concept.

From what we have seen was said by Ellen White, it should go without saying that the Son’s pre-existence as a separate personality from the living God (as Ellen White called God the Father) could be measured by some means (known to divinity) but that it was beyond human know it. Thus it appears that just like Waggoner, she did believe that there was a point in eternity, completely unknown to humanity, when the Son of God was brought forth of God (we shall see this more clearly in the next section when we comment on the wisdom of Proverbs chapter eight).

This concept of begotten was not as some may suggest meant by Ellen White to be applicable only from the incarnation or the resurrection. We know this because she did say to the Seventh-day Adventist youth of her day

“Before Christ came in the likeness of men, he existed in the express image of his Father. He thought it not robbery to be equal with God. Nevertheless he voluntarily emptied himself, and took the form of a servant. (*Ellen G. White, The Youth’s Instructor, 20th December 1900 ‘Christ’s humiliation’*)

As she also said in her previously quoted statements, Christ was “a Son begotten in the express image of the Father’s person” (see above). She also said He was “made in the express image of his person” (see above). These could only have been with reference to Christ’s pre-existence. In conclusion she said

“He was the incarnate God, the light of heaven and earth. In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” (*Ibid*)

In the late 1890s, this begotten faith was the faith of Seventh-day Adventists. This was the very same time as Ellen White sent her manuscripts on the life of Christ (*The Desire of Ages*) to the publishers. Needless to say, in *The Desire of Ages*, she did not intend to depict a trinitarian view of God. Hers was definitely a begotten concept of the pre-existent Christ.

Notice her last statement. She said that the Son was “the incarnate God”. This

was the same view as across the board in Seventh-day Adventism. It was that Christ is God Himself manifest in the flesh. We shall come back to this thought in section nine. For now we shall go to section eight. This is where we shall see that along with historic Christianity, Ellen White regarded the wisdom of Proverbs chapter eight as being Christ Himself. This ties in perfectly with the begotten concept of Christ.

Some may say that over the years and through further revelation from God that Ellen White changed her mind regarding this begotten concept but there is nothing in her writings to suggest that this was so. In fact in 1905, in a letter written to her grand-daughter, she said (this was 7 years after the publication of *The Desire of Ages*)

“I am now looking over my diaries and copies of letters written for several years back, commencing before I went to Europe, before you were born. I have the most precious matter to reproduce and place before the people in testimony form. While I am able to do this work, the people must have these things to revive past history, that they may see that there is one straight chain of truth, without one heretical sentence, in that which I have written.”  
*(Ellen G. White, Letter to Mabel White, Letter 329a, pages 1 and 2, November 16th 1905, Manuscript Releases MR No. 532)*

Ellen White did not regard herself as changing her mind about that which she had previously written. This Sonship of Christ was not a side issue but something very important. It was then, in 1905, still the denominational faith of Seventh-day Adventists.

## **The Begotten Series**

### **Section eight**

#### **Christ the wisdom of God “brought forth” (Proverbs 8:22-31)**

There can be no doubt that along with historic Christianity (the early Christian faith), Ellen White did believe that the wisdom brought forth of Proverbs chapter eight is the pre-existent Son of God. We shall see this in this section. Many believe that this wisdom is only meant to be figurative of Christ but this is not what we have been told through the spirit of prophecy.

#### **Substantiating the faith**

In the opening chapter of *Patriarchs and Prophets* Ellen White wrote

“The Sovereign of the universe was not alone in His work of beneficence. He had an associate -- a co-worker who could appreciate His purposes, and could share His joy in giving happiness to created beings. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God." John 1:1, 2” (Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 33 ‘Why sin was permitted?’ 1890)

Notice here that she refers to God as being “the Sovereign of the universe” and the Son as “an associate -- a co-worker”. These are two separate personalities.

We shall now see that *Patriarchs and Prophets* was one of the books that Ellen White said in 1903 was “especially adapted” for newcomers to the faith. She said in a letter to her son Edson

“Many will depart from the faith and give heed to seducing spirits. *Patriarchs and Prophets* and *The Great Controversy* are books that are especially adapted to those who have newly come to the faith, that they may be established in the truth. The dangers are pointed out that should be avoided by the churches. Those who become thoroughly acquainted with the lessons in these books will see the dangers before them and will be able to discern the plain, straight path marked out for them. They will be kept from strange paths. They will make straight paths for their feet, lest the lame be turned out of the way.

In *Desire of Ages*, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, *The Great Controversy*, and in *Daniel and the Revelation*, there is precious instruction. These books must be regarded as of special importance, and every effort should be made to get them before the people.” (*Ellen G. White, Letter 229 written from St. Helena, California to Edson White and W. C. White, 27th September 1903, manuscript releases Volume 21 No. 1594, see also ‘Evangelism’ chapter 10 page 366*)

Ellen White saw no problem between her *Patriarchs and Prophets*, also Uriah Smiths non-trinitarian *Daniel and the Revelation* with that of her supposedly trinitarian *The Desire of Ages*. This is very important because it shows that in 1903, Ellen White was promoting to be read by Seventh-day Adventists books that were definitely non-trinitarian. As we have seen in previous sections, there is no way that Ellen White would have classified *The Desire of Ages* as being trinitarian. Returning our thoughts to *Patriarchs and Prophets* she then added

“Christ, the Word, the only begotten of God, was one with the eternal Father -- one in nature, in character, in purpose -- the only being that could enter into all the counsels and purposes of God. "His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." Isaiah 9:6. His "goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." Micah 5:2.” (*Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, page 33 ‘Why sin was permitted?’ 1890*)

Here Ellen White says very clearly of the Son that He is “the Word, the only begotten of God”. This is not a denigrating of the Son of God but a showing of His true relationship with God. Take note also that she says that the Son is “one in nature, in character, in purpose” with God. She also said that He was “the only being that could enter into all the counsels and purposes of God”. No mention is made here of the Holy Spirit. Notice too her use of the word “begotten”. As we have previously seen, some say today that the original Greek word translated begotten (*monogenes*) simply means unique or one of a kind but obviously from what we have seen as was said by Ellen White (see previous section), she did not use it in that sense. She used it in a definite literal sense.



Note here also the wording in the KJV of Micah 5:2. This is where it says that the coming Messiah was “from everlasting”. Does this convey the idea that Christ never had a beginning? On the face of it, certainly it does but as we also noted in the [previous section](#), later in *The Desire of Ages* (1898), also in *Prophets and Kings* (1915), she used the margin notes, which says from *the days of eternity*. We noted too that this was in complete agreement with the Hebrew, that is that the Hebrew word translated everlasting in the KJV (*owlam*) does not mean forever but an indeterminable age (an unknown age). Ellen White then wrote

“And the Son of God declares concerning Himself: “The Lord possessed Me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I was set up from everlasting. . . . When He appointed the foundations of the earth: then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him: and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him.” Proverbs 8:22-30.” (*Ibid*)

Note very importantly that Ellen White says here in these verses quoted (Proverbs 8:22-30) that it was the Son of God that spoke through Solomon “concerning Himself”. It is also important to note the word “everlasting”. This is the same word *owlam*, which we noted above and in the previous section means an indeterminable age.

### **Christ the Wisdom of God**

We shall now consider in detail Proverbs 8:22-31. These verses, as they have been translated in the KJV, say

“The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth: While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth: When he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep: When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth: Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men.” Proverbs 8:22-31

Down through the centuries, as did Ellen White in her writings, the Christian Church historically applied these words to the Son of God. We now need to see what these various verses tell us about Christ.

### **Understanding *owlam***

Very soon after I began these trinity doctrine studies, I endeavoured to understand just what the various phrases and words in the verses of Proverbs

8:22-31 are meant to convey. The knowledge that I have gained I will now share with you.

The first word that we shall look at is the word everlasting (Hebrew *owlam*). This is exactly the same word as we have seen used in Micah 5:2 (see previous section).

When I first began to study this begotten concept, the first thing I did was to enquire concerning the Hebrew word for everlasting (I do not read Hebrew or Greek). I questioned in my mind that if the words brought forth and brought up etc as found in Proverbs 8:24, 25 and 30 are to be taken literally, then how can it be said that the Son has always been meaning that He is co-eternal with God the Father? This was just an honest question on my part. I discovered that the word everlasting was translated from the Hebrew transliteration *olam* or *owlam*. This is exactly the same word as used in Micah 5:2 which the KJV translates as "from everlasting". We noted in the previous section that on a number of occasions when Ellen White used this text, she chose to use the margin notes "from the days of eternity".

As we also noted, Strong's concordance says that this Hebrew word *owlam* means to convey the concept of being concealed (hidden). It was also meant to convey the thought of time out of mind (past or future) or the vanishing point. It is said to be practically eternity. Strong's also said that it had as its root word *alam* (or *awlam*) meaning to veil from sight. From this we can see that this word conveys the thought that something was so far back in eternity that it is totally beyond human comprehension and that it is practically forever. This is a very interesting thought because both Ellet Waggoner and Ellen White conveyed the very same thought in their writings.

Seven years ago (this was very near the beginning of my trinity studies) I encountered two people on the Internet who were making a study of the original Hebrew language. They were very willing to share their findings with others. I also found them very happy to answer any of my questions so I wrote requesting the meaning of this Old Testament Hebrew word translated everlasting (*owlam*). I wrote in an email

"Proverbs 8:23 says "I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was". According to Strong's concordance, this word 'everlasting' in Hebrew as used in this text comes from a root word meaning to 'hide' or 'conceal'. Would I be correct in saying that the Hebrew word 'everlasting' has more to it than the idea of no beginning and no end?"  
(Email, Terry Hill to Jeff Benner, 29th October 2001)

A few days later I received the following reply.

"First rule in Hebrew study - Hebrews think in concrete and Greeks think in Abstracts. Concrete thinkers think in relation to things that can be seen,

touched, smelled, heard or tasted. Some examples of this are tree, singing, smell of baking, etc. Abstract thoughts are such things as believe, faith, grace, etc. These cannot be sensed by the 5 senses. (*Jeff Benner to Terry Hill, email 1st November 2001*)

“The Hebrews always thought in concrete thought. The word everlasting (the usual translation of the Hebrew word "olam") is an abstract word. The Hebrew meaning is something like "behind the horizon". It is something that is beyond what you can see (or understand) at the moment but will be revealed as you travel closer (or at a later time).” (*Ibid*)

“The Greek idea of "everlasting" would have been a foreign concept to the ancient Hebrews. I hope this helps.” (*Ibid*)

I found this to be a very interesting and helpful reply. I also found it to be in keeping with Strong’s concordance that said the word *owlam* meant something that was so far back in eternity that it was beyond our understanding (certainly not revealed). In brief, it was hidden or concealed or time out of mind certainly not comprehensible to the human mind.

The reply to my question had said that the word *owlam* was meant to convey the thought that it was like something that was behind the horizon, which, at the moment, could not be seen but would appear evident later. It is true to say that when we look at the horizon we cannot see with mere human sight what is beyond. This is obviously in keeping with this begotten concept. We cannot tell or understand how far back in eternity that it happened. It is beyond human comprehension.

### **Understanding *qanah***

We now need to look at the word possessed as it is used in verse 22 of Proverbs chapter 8.

“The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old.” Proverbs 8:22

Notice first of all that the word LORD is in capital letters. This denotes that this word is translated from the Hebrew word transliterated YHWH (Yahweh or commonly Jehovah). The use of the word *possessed* in Proverbs 8 is very interesting. It is translated from the Hebrew word transliterated *qanah*. According to Strong’s concordance, this word stems from a root that means *to erect* or by implication *to create*. This has led to people asking why the word is translated *possessed*.

One explanation I have found offered is that when Jerome translated what we now refer to as the Latin Vulgate, he translated this word to mean *possessed*. Some say that he did this to avoid using the word *created*. This is because at the very same time that he was making his translation, the Arian controversy was

still at its height. Thus he avoided the use of the word create or created because he knew that these verses in Proverbs chapter 8, which were accepted by Christians as pertaining to the Son of God, could be taken to mean that the Son was a created being.

Whilst there may be certain credibility to this story (it may even be true), it is important to note that if the original writer of Proverbs had wanted to convey the thought of literally being created (that writer was Solomon, an educated man), there was another Hebrew word available for create. This word is *bara* as used in the very first verse in the Bible. This is where it says

[“In the beginning God created \(\*‘bara’\*\) the heaven and the earth.” Genesis 1:1](#)

So if the writer of Proverbs wanted to portray this wisdom of God as being literally created (as in God created this world) then he would have used the Hebrew word *bara* but he did not. So what did he mean to convey by using the word *qanah*?

In the KJV, this Hebrew word is usually translated to denote something that has been acquired. The majority of times it is translated buy, purchased, get or bought etc thus it is used to denote the acquisition of something not previously possessed. The writer of Proverbs uses it many times such as when saying “*getteth* understanding” (Proverbs 15:32), “*get* wisdom” (4:5, 16:16 and 17:16 etc), “*getteth* knowledge” (18:15) and “**buy** the truth” (23:23) etc. This gives us a very good guide as to what he intended the word *qanah* to convey in Proverbs 8:22.

Interesting to note is that this same Hebrew word (*qanah*) is used on three occasions to denote the possessor (see Genesis 14:19, 22 and Zechariah 11:5) but on each occasion it is with reference to something which has *been acquired*. It is also translated redeemed as in “We after our ability have *redeemed* our brethren the Jews which were sold unto the heathen” (see Nehemiah 5:8) and recover as in “the Lord shall set His hand again the second time to *recover* the remnant of his people” (see Isaiah 11:11). We can see that each time *qanah* is used, it denotes that which has been purchased or acquired. This is in keeping with Strong’s again which says that the word *qanah* is a verb part of speech, which as we have said before, is a happening (action), something done or doing word.

Interesting again is that certain translations such as the Jerusalem Bible (1966 edition), Revised Standard Version and the New English Bible (1970) translate the word *qanah* in Proverbs 8:22 as *created* whilst the Moffatt (1950) translation says *formed*. In addition to the word *formed*, the Goodspeed translation (1963) uses the words *fashioned (formed and fashioned)*. There are other translations that have the word *formed* and some that have *formed* in their footnotes whilst the New World Translation says *produced*. Such is the varied understandings of the Hebrew word *qanah* as used in Proverbs 8:22.

If you remember in section three we noted that the 3rd century Christian writer Justin said

“And it is written in the book of Wisdom: 'If I should tell you daily events, I would be mindful to enumerate them from the beginning. The Lord created me the beginning of His ways for His works. From everlasting He established me in the beginning, before He formed the earth, and before He made the depths, and before the springs of waters came forth, before the mountains were settled; He begets me before all the hills.' When I repeated these words, I added: "You perceive, my hearers, if you bestow attention, that the Scripture has declared that this Offspring was begotten by the Father before all things created; and that which is begotten is numerically distinct from that which begets, any one will admit." (*Ibid*)

Here Justin refers to this same Wisdom (Proverbs 8:22) as being *created* but He also refers to this as the “Offspring” “begotten by the Father” “before all things created” yet we know from what we have read in section three that Justin says that the Son is God.

Even more interesting (especially in the context of our studies on the word begotten), this same Hebrew word (*qanah*) in Genesis 4:1 is translated gotten.

“And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten (*qanah*) a man from the LORD.” Genesis 4:1

Note here that the word *qanah* is again used with reference to something being acquired and that Cain was brought forth from within the very being of Eve. Here it is associated with literal birth. The word *qanah* is constantly translated in the KJV in the sense of to buy, purchase and get etc (to acquire). This, as we have seen, is especially so as it is used by the writer of Proverbs.

Checking the various translations of this verse is also very interesting. Here are some examples

"The LORD brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old" New International Version

“The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old.” Revised Standard Version

“The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago.” New Revised Standard

“The LORD created me as the first of his creations, before all of his works.” Peshitta – Lamsa translation

“The LORD created me first of all, the first of his works, long ago” Good

## News Bible

“The LORD made me as the beginning of His way, the first of His works of old.” JPS Old Testament (1917)

"ADONAI made me as the beginning of his way, the first of his ancient works." The Complete Jewish Bible

All of these translations lend themselves to the idea that this “wisdom” of Proverbs 8:22 had origins. Note the latter translation (“as the beginning of his way”). I find this very interesting.

### Understanding *nacak*

There is another aspect of the verses in proverbs chapter eight to which I would like to draw your attention. This concerns the words *set up* as they are used in *set up from everlasting* (Proverbs 8:23) or as could be said with respect to what we have found in our studies *set up from the days of eternity*. Proverbs 8:23 says (KJV)

“I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was.”

The word “set”, according to Strong’s concordance, is translated from the Hebrew transliteration *nacak* meaning to pour out as in a libation to deity or to cast as in casting metal. The idea is pouring or to flow.

In the KJV, this same Hebrew word is translated pour in Exodus 30:9 and poured in such as Genesis 35:14, Numbers 28:7, 2 Samuel 23:16, 2 Kings 16:13 and 1 Chronicles 11:18. When applied to the Son of God, this is the pouring out of God Himself (in the person of His Son) as an offering to deity on behalf of the sins of mankind.

This *to cast* concept I also find very interesting because here in England, as in other places in the world, we have what is termed metal foundries. This is where metal casts are founded which entails the pouring out of molten metal into moulds of a required shape. Then, when the metal is cooled enough, it is taken from the mould. The finished metal object is then seen to be the exact shape of the mould from which it was cast thus it becomes the exact likeness of the form from which it originated. This is an apt description of the Son of God of whom the Scriptures say

“Who being the brightness of his [God’s] glory, and the express image of his [God’s] person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.” Hebrews 1:3

Again according to Strong’s concordance, the Greek word used here is *charakter* (express image) that originally was a tool that was used for engraving or marking

but later came to [mean](#) the engraving or the mark itself. Strong's also says that it means an exact impression or precise reproduction (image) of persons or things that are original. Here then we can see that the expression "[express image of his person](#)" gives the idea that the Son was the exact engraving (person/character) of the person of God. In section five we mentioned the Son as the exact impress of the Father.

These two concepts (poured out as a libation to deity and poured out as casting an image to the original pattern) as in Proverbs 8:24, we can see a picture forming of the idea of begotten. We can also say that love found (founded) a way.

Strong's concordance also says that by analogy, the word *nacak* (set) can mean *to anoint a king*. This lends itself to the understanding of the Son of God being referred to as the anointed one as is the meaning, as it is used in Daniel 9:25-26, of the word messiah. The Hebrew word used in these two verses in Daniel (9:25-6) is the only two occasions in the Bible where it is translated messiah. In the other 37 places that it is used (according to Strong's) it is translated anointed. This would be in keeping with Ellen White where she wrote

["God and Christ knew from the beginning, of the apostasy of Satan and of the fall of Adam through the deceptive power of the apostate. The plan of salvation was designed to redeem the fallen race, to give them another trial. Christ was appointed to the office of Mediator from the creation of God, set up from everlasting to be our substitute and surety." \(Ellen G. White, Review and Herald 5th April 1906 'The Word made Flesh'\)](#)

The most meaningful understanding of the use of this word *nacak* is as it is used with reference to the sanctuary service.

["And the drink offering thereof shall be the fourth part of an hin for the one lamb: in the holy place shalt thou cause the strong wine to be poured \(\*nacak\*\) unto the LORD for a drink offering." Numbers 28:7](#)

The "[drink offering](#)" was not consumed. It was always *poured out* as an offering (libation/honour) to the Lord.

When, because of the insurrection of his son (Absalom), King David took refuge in the Cave of Adullam near Bethlehem, he remembered how it was when he was a child. He longed to drink of the well by the gate but the town itself was in control of the Philistines. Notwithstanding this the Scriptures say

["And the three mighty men brake through the host of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem, that was by the gate, and took it, and brought it to David: nevertheless he would not drink thereof, but poured it out \[\*nacak\*\] unto the LORD." 2 Samuel 23:16](#)

Although thirsting for water, David poured out the drink as a libation - an offering to the Lord. Note the use of the word *nacak*. Again it is interesting to take into consideration other translations of Proverbs 8:23. These are such as

"From everlasting I was established, From the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth." NASV

"I was appointed from eternity, from the beginning, before the world began." NIV

"Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth." English Standard Version

"I have been established from everlasting, From the beginning, before there was ever an earth." NKJV

"I was appointed before the world, before the start, before the earth's beginnings." Complete Jewish Bible

"From the age I was anointed, from the first, From former states of the earth." Young's Literal Translation

"Fro with out bigynnyng Y was ordeined; and fro elde tymes, bifor that the erthe was maad." The Wycliffe translation

"I was set up from eternity, from the beginning, before the earth was." The Darby Translation

### **Understanding *chuwl***

We now need to study the words as translated in the KJV in Proverbs chapter 8 as brought forth. This is where it says

"When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth." Proverbs 8:24-25

This word (brought) in Proverbs 8:24 and 25 is used to translate the Hebrew word transliterated *chuwl*. This word means (according to Strong's concordance) to *twist and whirl* as in a circular or spiral manner. Whilst this word is used in a variety of ways, Strong's says that it is specifically used in connection with dancing or writhing in pain, particularly in connection with parturition, which is in reference to childbirth. A dictionary definition of parturition is

"The act of bringing forth, or being delivered of, young; the act of giving birth; delivery; childbirth or that which is brought forth; a birth."

Childbirth, the actual bringing forth of a child, as most mothers will tell us, is usually associated with pain but we would not associate God with pain.



Nevertheless, look at what Ellen White says concerning the Son in the incarnation.

“The work of redemption is called a mystery, and it is indeed the mystery by which everlasting righteousness is brought to all who believe. The race in consequence of sin was at enmity with God. Christ, at an infinite cost, by a painful process, mysterious to angels as well as to men, assumed humanity. Hiding His divinity, laying aside His glory, He was born a babe in Bethlehem. (Ellen G. White, MS 29, 1899, see also 7th volume Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary page 915)

Here we are told that when the Son of God assumed humanity, it was a “painful process” that neither the angels nor men could understand. As far as I know, no other explanation was ever given by Ellen White therefore it is probably best not to conjecture further. Suffice to say that according to Ellen White, the incarnation did cause physical pain to the pre-existent Son of God.

Could this possibly be similar as happened in the original begetting of the Son? I say this because this is what the Hebrew word *chuwl* means (brought forth in pain as in childbirth).

On checking the various translations, I found that most stayed with the brought forth concept but the following are some that differed

“When there were no oceans, I was given birth, when there were no springs abounding with water; before the mountains were settled in place, before the hills, I was given birth”. New International version

“When I was born, there were no oceans or springs of water. My birth was before mountains were formed or hills were put in place.” Contemporary English Version

“I was born before the oceans, when there were no springs of water. I was born before the mountains, before the hills were set in place” Good News Bible

“The depths were not as yet, and I was already conceived, neither had the fountains of waters as yet sprung out. The mountains, with their huge bulk, had not as yet been established: before the hills, I was brought forth” Douay Rheims

“When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills were formed was I conceived” Peshitta – Lamsa

“Depthis of wattris weren not yit; and Y was conseyued thanne. The wellis of wattris hadden not brokun out yit, and hillis stoden not togidere yit bi sad

heuynesse; bifor litil hillis Y was born.” Wycliffe Bible (ˆ 1395)

When I was borne, there were nether depthes ner springes of water. Before the foundacions of ye mountaynes were layed, yee before all hilles was I borne.” Miles Coverdale (1535)

Each of these translations have this wisdom of chapter 8 has having an origin as like being birthed. That origin was obviously in God the Father.

### **Understanding *amown* (or *amon*)**

Lets now take a look at the other Hebrew word that is translated brought as in Proverbs 8:30. As has been said, this is a different Hebrew word than the one translated brought as in verse 24 and 25. The KJV says

“Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him”

The Hebrew word transliterated “brought up” is *amown* (or *amon*). Strong’s concordance says of this word

“In the sense of training; skilled.” (*James Strong, The New Strong’s exhaustive concordance of the Bible, ‘Hebrew and Aramaic dictionary of the Old Testament, page 10*)

As Wycliffe’s translation has Proverbs 8:30

“Y was making alle thingis with him. And Y delitide bi alle daies, and pleiede bifore hym in al tyme,” Proverbs 8:30 Wycliffe’s translation

This word *amown* is derived from *aman* and means (again according to Strong’s concordance) to build up or support or to foster as a parent or nurse (nursing). Once again we have the idea of a parent and child relationship, especially as the child is maturing (a building or bringing up - training). It is more often used in the Old Testament to denote faithfulness, believing and trusting like a child, particularly in a growing relationship. Take for example its usage in Genesis 15:6. This is a text of Scripture with which most Christians are conversant. It says of Abraham

“And he believed (*Heb. aman*) in the LORD; and he [God] counted it to him [Abraham] for righteousness.” Genesis 15:6

Here we can see Abraham, in his relationship with God, trusting like a child. It is a building up process. Repeatedly the word *aman* is used in the Old Testament to mean to *foster a belief* or to *be assured*. Strong’s concordance says that it means to *build up* or *support* and to *foster* as a parent or a nurse. It also says that it figuratively means to be *firm* or *faithful* or *trust* or *believe*. Note here in this next example of the usage of *aman* that the Hebrew word is translated nursing. It

says in Numbers 11:11-12

“And Moses said unto the LORD, Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? and wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me? Have I conceived all this people? have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing (*aman*) father beareth the sucking child, unto the land which thou swarest unto their fathers?” Numbers 11:11-12

The Hebrew word *aman* is used here to depict a nursing father who carries his children in his bosom. I am sure that most people will find this very interesting because as John the Gospel writer says

“No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him”. John 1:18

Note now its usage in the book of the Bible that portrays one of the most loving relationships of all time. That is the relationship between Ruth and Naomi. Ruth had married Naomi’s son Mahlon but when he died, she accompanied her mother-in-law back to Naomi’s hometown of Bethlehem. Ruth then married Boaz and produced a son that they named Obed. This child became the father of Jesse, the grandfather of David and an ancestor of Jesus. When Obed was born the Scriptures say

“And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse (*aman*) unto it.” Ruth 4:16

Note that the word *aman* is used in the sense again of taking care and bringing up (fostering in the sense of developing, encouraging, nurturing and building up trust etc) a child. This is also how it is used in 2 Samuel 4:4, 2 Kings 10:1, 2 Kings 10:5, Esther 2:7 and Esther 2:20.

The idea of firmness of belief and trust in this relationship is very prominent in this word. Look at the way it is used in Isaiah 22:23. Here are a number of translations of that verse

“And I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place; and he shall be for a glorious throne to his father's house.” KJV

"I will drive him like a peg in a firm place, ..." New American Standard Version

“I will fasten him firmly in place like a peg, ..." Good News Bible

“I will fasten him as a peg in a secure place, ..." JPS Old Testament (1917)

"I will fasten him firmly in place like a peg, ..." The Complete Jewish Bible

And Y schal sette hym a stake in a feithful place, ..." Wycliffe Bible

The picture of wisdom in Proverbs chapter 8 is of a Son being brought up in a trusting relationship with His Father. The idea is firmness of relationship is prominent. Translations that give this same impression in Proverbs 8:30 are

"I was like a child by his side. I was delighted every day, enjoying his presence all the time" New Century version

"I was with him forming all things: and was delighted every day, playing before him at all times" Douay-Rheims

"I was with him as someone he could trust. For me, every day was pure delight, as I played in his presence all the time" The Complete Jewish Bible

"then I was by him [his] nursling, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him" The Darby translation

"Then I was by Him, as a nursling; and I was daily all delight, playing always before Him" JPS Old Testament (1917)

Other translations interpret *aman* as master craftsmen, workman or architect and lend themselves to the idea that God created all things through Christ but the general idea as seen in Scripture regarding this word is that it pertains to a progressive trust, believing and faithfulness as in a child/parent relationship.

### **Delighting with the sons of men**

Note the last verse of our study. It says (I have included the context of verse 30)

"Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him. Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men." Proverbs 8:31

How is this last part (verse 31) applicable to the pre-existent Son of God? How in the "habitable part of his earth", meaning with created people, did He delight?

First of all God had delighted in His creation. He had created both Adam and Eve in His own likeness (Genesis 1:26). Sin had marred that likeness but it did not stop God delighting in humanity (the sons of men). The Hebrew word used here translated "delights" is the Hebrew *sha shua*. It literally means delight and pleasure (enjoyment). After the fall of man and all the way through the times of the Old Testament, God, in the person of His Son, communicated and tarried with humanity. As the Scriptures say of Christ

"Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same

spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ." 1 Corinthians 10:1

It was the Son of God who led the children of Israel in their wanderings through the wilderness. It was also He that since the fall of man has communicated with humanity.

"In all these revelations of the divine presence the glory of God was manifested through Christ. Not alone at the Saviour's advent, but through all the ages after the Fall and the promise of redemption, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself." 2 Corinthians 5:19. Christ was the foundation and center of the sacrificial system in both the patriarchal and the Jewish age. Since the sin of our first parents there has been no direct communication between God and man. The Father has given the world into the hands of Christ, that through His mediatorial work He may redeem man and vindicate the authority and holiness of the law of God. All the communion between heaven and the fallen race has been through Christ. It was the Son of God that gave to our first parents the promise of redemption. It was He who revealed Himself to the patriarchs. Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses understood the gospel. They looked for salvation through man's Substitute and Surety. These holy men of old held communion with the Saviour who was to come to our world in human flesh; and some of them talked with Christ and heavenly angels face to face." (*Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets page 366, 'The Law and the Covenants'*)

Here we can see just what is meant by the Son of God saying of Himself in the book of Proverbs that as one brought up with His Father, "my delights were with the sons of men" Proverbs 8:31. God, in the person of His only begotten Son, tarried with fallen humanity. As Ellen White put it with regards to the Son delighting in the sons of men after telling the story of the impiety of King Ahaziah the son of Ahab

"What had He [God] not done to win the hearts of the people of Israel and to inspire them with confidence in Himself? For ages He had been giving His people manifestations of unexampled kindness and love. From the beginning He had shown that His "delights were with the sons of men." Proverbs 8:31. He had been a very present help to all who sought Him in sincerity." (*Ellen G. White Prophets and Kings page 211, 'The Fall of the House of Ahab, see also 5th Volume of Testimonies page 195, Review and Herald 27th June 1882, article 'Shall we Consult Spiritualist Physicians, and 15th January 1914 article 'The Fall of the House of Ahab'*)

Even though sin has marred His image in the sons and daughters of men, God still delights in His communion with us. This verse has its application in that it was the Son of God who through the wilderness of this world has led God's children. Other translations of Proverbs 8:31 say

“Rejoicing in his habitable earth; And my delight was with the sons of men”  
American Standard Version

“rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind” New International

“rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race” New  
Revised Standard

“Playing in the world: and my delights were to be with the children of men”  
Douay Rheims

“playing everywhere on his earth, and delighting to be with humankind” The  
Complete Jewish Bible

“As for the rounde compasse of this worlde I make it ioyfull: for my delite is to  
be among the chyldren of men” The Bishop’s Bible (1568)

“and Y pleiede in the world; and my delices ben to be with the sones of men”  
Wycliffe Bible

“Playing in His habitable earth, and my delights are with the sons of men” JPS  
Old Testament

### **An appraisal**

As we have seen, these verses in Proverbs 8:22-31, according to both historical Christianity and Ellen White, refer to the Son of God. As we have studied this verse in detail, we have seen that this wisdom (the Son of God) was possessed (acquired) as He was brought forth (a twist and whirl) by being set up (poured out) and brought up (fostered as meaning nurtured) from everlasting (time out of mind).

In order to see how they apply to the begotten Son of God, lets just read these verses from Proverbs chapter eight again. This time we will include the things that we have found out about various Hebrew words.

“The LORD possessed [acquired] me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up [poured out as a libation/cast/anointed] from everlasting [time out of mind], from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth [twist and whirl]; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth [twist and whirl]: While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth: When he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep: When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he

appointed the foundations of the earth: Then I was by him, as one brought up [nurtured as a child/building up a continuing trust relationship] with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him: Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights [enjoyments] were with the sons of men [the peoples of the earth]." Proverbs 8:22-31

These verses are a beautiful expression of the father/son relationship that has existed from eternity between God the Father and His Son. To say that the words Father and Son are only metaphorical (figurative), as do certain Seventh-day Adventists today, is to totally destroy this beauty. This can be seen in their current literature and the Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia (see Volume 3 pages 972-973). We shall be taking a look at this current theology in section ten.

### **A continuing belief**

All of this in *Patriarchs and Prophets* (1890) is much the same as she wrote in the years following when she upheld the pioneers in their begotten beliefs. This was even after the publication of *The Desire of Ages* (see above).

The year following the publication of *The Desire of Ages*, this time in the *Signs of the Times*, Ellen White wrote again with reference to Christ being the wisdom of Proverbs chapter 8 (note the article title)

"The Lord possessed Me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old," Christ says. "When He gave to the sea His decree, that the waters should not pass His commandment; when He appointed the foundations of the earth; then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him." But the only-begotten Son of God humbled Himself to come to this earth." (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 22nd February 1899, 'The measure of God's love'*)

It is not surprising therefore that the next year she wrote again in the *Signs of the Times* (this time the article was called *Resistance to light*)

"Through Solomon Christ declared: "The Lord possessed Me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth. . . . When He gave to the sea His decree, that the waters should not pass His commandment; when He appointed the foundations of the earth; then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him." (*Ellen G. White, The Signs of the Times, 29th August 1900 'Resistance to Light'*)

Again we see Ellen White saying that these verses in Proverbs chapter eight are directly applicable to the Son of God. In fact just as she did previously, she again says that through Solomon, Christ was speaking of Himself. Note very

importantly that this means that Christ Himself was saying that prior to anything being created, He is the one “brought forth” and “as one brought up” with God. Again many believe this to be with reference to the original begetting of the Son. Some claim that these verses found in Proverbs chapter 8 are only symbolic or allegorical language but here we see that Ellen White never used them in that sense. She obviously took them to be literal, just as she did the begotten concept.

“In speaking of His pre-existence, Christ carries the mind back through dateless ages. He assures us that there never was a time when He was not in close fellowship with the eternal God. He to whose voice the Jews were then listening had been with God as one brought up with Him.” (*Ibid*)

The words of this statement are understandably used by the Seventh-day Adventist trinitarians to show that Ellen White believed that Christ, as a separate personality from God, has always existed (co-eternal with God the Father) but as we have seen from above, this is not what she meant. She was obviously saying that since He was begotten, this is how it has been. In the light of her remarks just one year previous (1899) where she said that Christ’s divine life could not be “reckoned by human computation” or “measured by figures” (see previous section), in what other way can she be interpreted?

Note well the last sentence here. Ellen White said again that Christ was “as one brought up with Him”, meaning as one brought up with “the Eternal God”. Here she was differentiating again with respect to personality. Christ was one personality whilst “the eternal God” was another. Notice too who it was that was doing the bringing up and who it was that was brought up. It was the “eternal God” that brought up the Son (see also Proverbs 8:30). To a thinking person this should be very significant. The entire language of Proverbs 8:22-31 is birth or parent/child concept.

In terms of personality, Ellen White was saying here that Christ is not “the eternal God”. This is exactly the same as was said by the early pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism. This is because just like Ellen White, they too differentiated between these two divine beings. This is why they objected so much to the trinity doctrine. At the time of the Kellogg crisis (early 1900s) Ellen White did say concerning the Son

“The Son is all the fullness 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.” (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Series B No.7, page 62 1906 ‘Come out and be Separate’*)

According to Ellen White, the Son is the “personality of the Father” shown (revealed). This should tell us a great deal about the Son being God begotten



and the identification of the wisdom of chapter eight.

For now we shall go to section nine. This is where we shall encounter the old theology of Seventh-day Adventism.

## **The Begotten Series**

### **Section nine**

#### **God the Father in the person of the Son**

The preponderant belief of Seventh-day Adventists has always been that Christ is God but throughout the time of Ellen White's ministry and even beyond, this was always professed in terms that were strictly non-trinitarian. In other words, whilst Ellen White was alive, Seventh-day Adventists made no profession of the trinity doctrine. This was no different than it was in early Christianity (see section two and section three). This was prior to the 4th century when the trinity doctrine was formulated. This was also the time period when in the form of the established church, Christianity was fast heading towards apostasy. See section nine of the detailed history series

[A Detailed History of the Trinity Doctrine](#)

Regarding the trinity doctrine and the divinity of Christ, James White, in 1877, expressed the generally held view of Seventh-day Adventists.

“The inexplicable Trinity that makes the Godhead three in one and one in three, is bad enough; but that ultra Unitarianism that makes Christ inferior to the Father is worse. Did God say to an inferior, “Let us make man in our image?” (*James White, Review and Herald November 29th article ‘Christ Equal with God’ 1877*)

Even having been married to Ellen White for 31 years, James White remained, just as he had done so throughout his time as a Seventh-day Adventist, a devout non-trinitarian. He did not believe though, as can be very clearly seen here, that Christ was in any way a lesser being than God. He wrote this 4 years before his death in 1881. He died a non-trinitarian.

J. H. Waggoner, the father of Ellet Waggoner, was a long time contemporary of James White. In the 1884 edition of a publication that he authored concerning the atonement he wrote (note the use of the word “we” denoting Waggoner was referring to Seventh-day Adventists in general)

“Many theologians really think that the Atonement, in respect to its dignity and efficacy, rests upon the doctrine of a trinity. But we fail to see any connection between the two. To the contrary, the advocates of that doctrine really fall into the difficulty which they seem anxious to avoid.” (*J. H. Waggoner, ‘The Atonement in Light of Nature and Revelation’, 1884 Edition, chapter ‘Doctrine of a Trinity Subversive of the Atonement’*)

By way of explanation of trinitarian thinking (note again the use of “they” and “we”) Waggoner added

“Their [the trinitarians] difficulty consists in this: They take the denial of a trinity to be equivalent to a denial of the divinity of Christ. Were that the case, we should cling to the doctrine of a trinity as tenaciously as any can; but it is not the case.” (*Ibid*)

This is very true. Most trinitarians will say that unless the divinity of Christ is expressed as in the trinity doctrine, it is not correctly expressed. This is even though it is an assumed doctrine. See section four of the detailed history series [here](#)

[A Detailed History of the Trinity Doctrine](#)

Waggoner then said (note again the word “our”)

“They who have read our remarks on the death of the Son of God know that we firmly believe in the divinity of Christ; but we cannot accept the idea of a

trinity, as it is held by Trinitarians, without giving up our claim on the dignity of the sacrifice made for our redemption.” (*Ibid*)

Whilst we shall not be pursuing this latter line of thinking here (the atonement), suffice to say that trinitarians believe that the personage of the pre-existent Christ (or as many term Him the pre-existent Son of God) did not really die at Calvary. The only thing that trinitarians say died was the human nature of Christ. Whatever version of the trinity doctrine is accepted, this is standard theology. This is one of the reasons why early Seventh-day Adventists rejected the trinity doctrine. They believed that the pre-existent Son of God really did die.

Note Waggoner says that Seventh-day Adventists firmly believe in the divinity of Christ. There was no *He might be* sort of divine or *in one sense* he may be divine. The belief was that He is divine in the highest sense of its meaning. As James White said (see above), Christ was not regarded by Seventh-day Adventists as a lesser divine being than God the Father but equal to Him. This is the testimony of the Scriptures through and through (see John 1:1 and Philippians 2:5-8 etc)

In its various forms, Joseph Waggoner’s atonement publication was circulated amongst Seventh-day Adventists for 23 years. This was between 1861 and 1884. This shows how highly this work was valued. It also shows what the accepted faith of Seventh-day Adventists was during that time. That Christ was fully divine and fully God was never in question within Seventh-day Adventism but it was not professed in terms that were trinitarian.

As Russell Holt put it in a term paper he completed for Dr. Mervyn Maxwell in 1969 (this was with respect to the time period leading up to the death of James White in 1881)

“A survey of other Adventist writers during these years reveals, that to a man, they rejected the trinity, yet, with equal unanimity they upheld the divinity of Christ.” (*Russell Holt, “The doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination: Its rejection and acceptance”, A term paper for Dr. Mervyn Maxwell, 1969*)

Holt then wrote of the pioneer’s beliefs

“To reject the trinity is not necessarily to strip the Saviour of His divinity. Indeed, certain Adventist writers felt that it was the trinitarians who filled the role of degrading Christ’s divine nature.” (*Ibid*)

During the 1880s as the famous Minneapolis Conference loomed ahead (1888), this was the preponderant faith of Seventh-day Adventists. This was the faith that professed Christ to be fully divine and fully God yet not as expressed in the trinity doctrine. This is something that brought about an antagonism between Seventh-day Adventists and the other denominations, which, in the main, were trinitarian. It was this one belief (non-trinitarianism) that acted as an impenetrable

barrier between them and us. In other words, whilst that non-trinitarian barrier was in place, there could be no concord between the trinitarian denominations and us.

It is different today. Today the evangelicals now accept us as fellow Christians but this would not have happened if we had not adopted the trinity doctrine as part of our fundamental beliefs.

### **Christ is fully God - the testimony of Ellen White**

Throughout the entirety of her writings, Ellen White maintained that Christ was God essentially. Never once did she waver from this view. This was also the preponderant view of our pioneers. In such statements through the spirit of prophecy Seventh-day Adventists were told (volumes more can be found)

“This Saviour was the brightness of His Father's glory and the express image of His person. He possessed divine majesty, perfection, and excellence. He was equal with God. "It pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell." "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." (*Ellen G. White, Testimonies Volume 2 page 200, 'The sufferings of Christ'*)

“The Son of God was in the form of God, and he thought it not robbery to be equal with God. He was the only one, who as a man walked the earth, who could say to all men, Who of you convinceth me of sin? He had united with the Father in the creation of man, and he had power through his own divine perfection of character to atone for man's sin, and to elevate him, and bring him back to his first estate.” (*Ellen G. White, Spirit of Prophecy Volume 2 page 10, 'The first advent of Christ', 1877*)

“The Jews utterly failed to understand the spiritual connection which identified Christ with both the human and the divine, and gave fallen man a presentation of what he should strive to become. Christ was God in the flesh. As the son of David, he stood forth a perfect type of true manhood, bold in doing his duty, and of the strictest integrity, yet full of love, compassion, and tender sympathy. In his miracles he revealed himself as Lord. When he was asked by Philip to show him the Father, he answered, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father." (*Ellen G. White, Spirit of Prophecy, Volume 3 page 259, 1878, 'Ascension of Christ'*)

“The Redeemer of the world clothed his divinity with humanity, that he might reach humanity; for, in order to bring to the world salvation, it was necessary that humanity and divinity should be united. Divinity needed humanity, that humanity might afford a channel of communication between God and man,

and humanity needed divinity, that a power from above might restore man to the likeness of God. Christ was God, but he did not appear as God. He veiled the tokens of divinity, which had commanded the homage of angels and called forth the adoration of the universe of God. He made himself of no reputation, took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of sinful flesh. For our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 20th February 1893, ‘The plan of salvation’*)

“The world was made by him, "and without him was not anything made that was made." If Christ made all things, he existed before all things. The words spoken in regard to this are so decisive that no one need be left in doubt. Christ was God essentially, and in the highest sense. He was with God from all eternity, God over all, blessed forevermore.” (*Ellen White, Review and Herald, 5th April 1906, ‘The Word made flesh’*)

This was indeed the faith of early Seventh-day Adventists. This faith was that Christ is no one less than God Himself **in the person of His own Son**. We shall now take a look at the latter from the viewpoint of the writings of Ellen White. This will serve to further endorse the begotten theology.

### **God in the person of His Son**

Many statements of Ellen White can be found expressing the view that Christ was God Himself in the person of His Son. These are such as

“We are called upon to behold the Lord our Father in the person of his Son. Christ came in the robe of the flesh, with his glory subdued in humanity, that lost man might communicate with him and live. Through Christ we may comprehend something of him who is glorious in holiness. Jesus is the mystic ladder by which we may mount to behold the glory of the infinite God. By faith we behold Christ standing between humanity and divinity, connecting God and man, and earth and heaven.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 20th January 1890, ‘God made manifest in Christ’*)

The “Lord our Father” is God our Father. In a General Conference Bulletin in 1899 Ellen White said

“In the person of his only begotten Son, the God of heaven has condescended to stoop to our human nature. The Father in heaven has a voice and a person which Christ expressed.” (*Ellen G. White, General Conference Daily Bulletin. 6th March 1899, ‘Special Testimonies’*)

Take particular note as to who it was that Ellen White said had condescended to take human nature. It was God Himself - in the person of His own Son. In the *Review and Herald* of 1898 and 1904 we find these words

“In the person of his only begotten Son, the God of heaven has

condescended to stoop to our human nature. To the question of Thomas, Jesus said: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake." (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 8th November 1898, 'The revelation of God', see also Review and Herald 17th March 1904*)

In *The Desire of Ages* the same thought comes out even more clearly.

"God has adopted human nature in the person of His Son, and has carried the same into the highest heaven. It is the "Son of man" who shares the throne of the universe. It is the "Son of man" whose name shall be called, "Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." Isa. 9:6. The I Am is the Daysman between God and humanity, laying His hand upon both. He who is "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners," is not ashamed to call us brethren. Heb. 7:26; 2:11." (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, page 25, 'God with us'*)

This was much the same as she said to the Seventh-day Adventist youth the year previous to the publication of *The Desire of Ages*.

"What an ocean of love is circulating, like a divine atmosphere, around the world! What manner of love is this, that the eternal God should adopt human nature in the person of his Son, and carry the same into the highest heaven!" (*Ellen G. White, The Youth's Instructor, 29th July 1897, 'The gift of God's grace'*)

These statements and others like them can only be fully understood in a begotten Christ concept. To view them any other way they do not make sense.

Seventh-day Adventists, regarding their views of Christ, were often misunderstood. They were often thought of, because they were not trinitarians, as denying His divinity. We shall see now that Ellen White experienced this misunderstanding.

### **Ellen White experiences the misunderstandings of others to the non-trinitarian faith of Seventh-day Adventists**

Just two years previous to her begotten and made statements (1895) that we noted in previous sections (this was just 5 years after the Minneapolis General Conference), Ellen White spoke of the misrepresentations, in Australia and New

Zealand (where she was then residing), of the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists. This she said was particularly with regards to what Seventh-day Adventists believed regarding the divinity of Christ (these begotten and made statements referred to here we shall look at again later in this section). She explained

“In this country, the denominational ministers tell the most unblushing falsehoods to their congregations in reference to our work and our people.”  
(*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 5th December 1893, ‘An appeal for the Australasian field’*)

She followed this by saying

“Whatever false report has been started, is circulated by those who oppose the truth, and is repeated from church to church and from community to community. The circulators of these falsehoods take no pains to find out whether or not they are true, for many of those who repeat the reports, though not the framers of them, still love the false reports, and take delight in giving them a wide circulation.” (*Ibid*)

This is very often the scenario today. She then added

“They do not, like honest, just men, come to those who are accused, and seek to find out what is the truth concerning what they have heard in regard to their faith; but without inquiry they spread false statements in order to prejudice the people against those who hold the truth.” (*Ibid*)

Again how true this is today. Some people would rather believe gossip (perhaps even lies) than ask the ones who are being gossiped about what they actually do believe.

People who do this (said Ellen White) are not acting like honest men but in order to cause prejudice spread false statements about those of whom they are gossiping. Note here that Ellen White said that this was to prejudice people’s minds “**against those who hold the truth**”. This is very important. She was referring primarily of course to what was then, in the 1890s, held and being taught as truth by Seventh-day Adventists. Take particular note that this was whilst we were still very much a non-trinitarian denomination, meaning teaching the aforementioned begotten concept of Christ.

As an example of what she had claimed, Ellen White then recounted an incident when attempts were made to hire a hall for evangelistic purposes (she had said previously that they could not use tents in many places as they had done in America because the wind would strip them to ribbons). She said

“For instance, an effort was made to obtain the use of the hall at a village four miles from Hastings, where some of our workers proposed to present the gospel to the people; but they did not succeed in obtaining the hall, because a

schoolteacher there opposed the truth, and declared to the people that Seventh-day Adventists did not believe in the divinity of Christ.” (*Ibid*)

Here then is the reason why Seventh-day Adventists (in this instance) were not allowed to hire the hall. It was said that they “did not believe in the divinity of Christ”. Note very importantly that the schoolteacher mentioned was said by Ellen White to have “opposed the truth”. Again this is very important. Ellen White then went on to say

“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. But the answer was given that they did not want that the doctrines of Seventh-day Adventists should be promulgated in that community. So the door was closed.” (*Ibid*)

I must admit that at one time I had wondered myself why Christians of other denominations had come to this conclusion. I reasoned, “How could anyone believe this, seeing that we were trinitarians”, which I had once erroneously believed. When I realised that from our beginnings, also for decades after the death of Ellen White, we had been a non-trinitarian denomination, the truth suddenly struck home to me. People thought as I once did that a denial of the trinity was equivalent to a denial of Christ's divinity, which of course, as also I realise now, is far from being the truth (see J. H. Waggoner's comments above for the same reasoning).

Whilst Ellen White did say that the man who had refused them the hire of the hall may not have known what Seventh-day Adventist really believed about Christ, she also said that he was told “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”. She also said that when people were spreading false rumours about these non-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists, they only did this “in order to prejudice the people against those who hold the truth”. This “truth” of course included what our pioneers, including Ellen White, then believed and taught about the divinity of Christ, which was of course **a non-trinitarian belief** (perhaps better said semi-Arianism). Here Ellen White says that what Seventh-day Adventists were then teaching was “the truth”.

This realisation is a serious indictment against those like William Johnsson (retired editor of the Review) who said in 1994

“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. Only gradually did this false doctrine give way to the Biblical truth, and largely under the impact of Ellen Whites writings in statements such as “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived. (Desire of ages p 530)” (*William*



*Johnsson Adventist, Review January 6th 1994 'Present Truth - Walking in God's Light', 1994)*

It is quite apparent that Ellen White did not reason the same way as William Johnsson – far from it. She said that what the pioneers were teaching about Christ, albeit it was in a begotten non-trinitarian framework, was the truth. This is in contrast to William Johnson's view that they were teaching "false doctrine" and not "Biblical truth". There is an obvious conflict of views here but we must remember that Ellen White was God's messenger to the remnant and she was gifted with the spirit of prophecy. This cannot be said of William Johnsson.

### **An ongoing problem**

An interesting observation is one that was made by Gilbert Valentine in 2005. Referring to the mid 1890s (the time period we have just spoken of) and regarding the work in Australia he said

*"Church workers were astonished at the interest, particularly in the light of the widespread prejudice against Adventists in the community. Uriah Smith's Thoughts on Daniel and Revelation had been widely distributed by colporteurs, and its semi-Arian teaching on the pre-existence of Christ had caused many to view Adventists as a heretical, sub-Christian sect that denied the divinity of Christ." (Gilbert Valentine, Ministry, May 2005, 'A slice of history: How clearer views of Jesus developed in the Adventist Church')*

This so-called semi-Arianism of Seventh-day Adventism was a continuing source of problems for Seventh-day Adventism but as was said by Ellen White, it was the truth that God had given to our pioneers. This is why she upheld both the teaching and Seventh-day Adventists in these beliefs.

The book mentioned here ("Uriah Smith's Thoughts on Daniel and Revelation") was at one time at the centre of the trinity controversy. This is seen in section thirty-eight, section forty-one, section forty-six and section forty-seven of the detailed history series.

### **A Detailed History of the Trinity Doctrine**

In these sections it is seen that in the 1940s to erase the non-trinitarianism from its pages, this book underwent a massive editing. This was when trinitarianism was on its way to becoming prominent within Seventh-day Adventism.

### **The eternal presence**

We noted previously that in 1895 (this was 2 years **after** the above quoted experience in Australia), Ellen White did very clearly say that Christ, in His pre-existence, was a begotten Son (see section seven). This statement therefore acted as confirmation of that which up to then was what was being taught as the truth by Seventh-day Adventists. We also noted that 4 years later in 1899 she also said that His pre-existent life could not be measured by "human

computation” and “is not measured by figures” (see section seven). This leads us to the obvious conclusion that even after the publication of *The Desire of Ages*, Ellen White had not changed her views.

In 1894, the year following the above experience in Australia (this was whilst she was still in Australia completing the manuscripts for *The Desire of Ages*), Ellen White asked the youth of her day (this was ***the year before*** she made her begotten and made statements)

“Who is Christ? -- He is the only begotten Son of the living God. He is to the Father as a word that expresses the thought, -- as a thought made audible. Christ is the word of God. Christ said to Philip, "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father." His words were the echo of God's words. Christ was the likeness of God, the brightness of his glory, the express image of his person." (*Ellen G. White, The Youth's Instructor, 28th June 1894, 'Grow in grace'*)

Ellen White was here echoing the Scriptures by saying that Christ is the “express image” of God’s person (Hebrews 1:3) also that He is the “word of God” (John 1:1), God’s “thought made audible”. Note she differentiates as usual between the One she refers to as “the living God” and His “only begotten Son”. Her remarks concerning the Son of God being like an expression of thought (a word) are also very interesting although we will not comment here. She said this the year previous to her begotten and made statements concerning Christ.

In conclusion there is no way whatsoever that *The Desire of Ages* (1898) could depict a Christ any differently to what we have seen Ellen White confess here, meaning as a truly begotten Son. Certainly in this book she does not depict God as a trinity. That is only part and parcel of the machinations of the human mind. Note here something really very interesting.

Returning our thoughts to the “I AM” statement (this time as referred to in *The Desire of Ages*) Ellen White wrote

“Silence fell upon the vast assembly. The name of God, given to Moses to express the idea of the eternal presence, had been claimed as His own by this Galilean Rabbi. He had announced Himself to be the self-existent One, He who had been promised to Israel, "whose goings forth have been from of old, from the days of eternity." Micah 5:2, margin. (*Ellen White, The Desire of Ages, page 469, 'The light of Life'*)

Here we are told that the words “I am” as Jesus used them as quoted in John 8:58 express the idea of “the eternal presence”. This is very important for us to remember because this tells us that she believed, just as the Bible says, that Jesus is God Himself manifest in the flesh (see John 1:1, 14, Hebrews 1:1-3, 1 Timothy 3:16 etc). Note again her use of the margin notes of Micah 5:2. This was in keeping with her statements about Christ’s pre-existence as not being reckoned “by human computation” or “measured by figures” (see section seven).

This statement was obviously drawn from the thoughts first penned in a manuscript that the Ellen White Estate confirms was written on February 18th and February 19th, 1895, at Granville, New South Wales. This is obviously during the time that Ellen White was residing in Australia (1891-1900). This is when she said (this is quite possibly where her above *Desire of Ages* “eternal presence” statement comes from)

“I AM means an eternal presence; the past, present, and future are alike to God. He sees the most remote events of past history and the far distant future with as clear a vision as we do those things that are transpiring daily.” (*Ellen G. White, Manuscript No. 1084, February 18, 19th, 1895, page 21*)

She added two paragraphs later

“Then said the Jews unto Him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast Thou seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I AM. Then took they up stones to cast at Him” because of that saying [verses 57-59]. Christ was using the great name of God that was given to Moses to express the idea of the eternal presence.” (*Ibid*)

I say this is very interesting because it means that this statement regarding Christ as “the eternal presence” (the I AM), was written by Ellen White 3 months before she wrote the article in the *Signs of the Times* (30th May 1895) saying that Christ is “a Son begotten in the express image of the Fathers person”.

“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, ‘Christ our complete salvation’*)

This eternal presence statement was also written almost 5 months before the article was written in which she referred to Christ as being “Him who was made”.

“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’*)

It is because Ellen White believed that Christ is the “eternal presence” (Feb 1895), this did not stop her saying that He is “begotten” (May 1895) or “made” (July 1895), in fact this made it imperative. In other words, if Christ is God begotten then He must be the “eternal presence”. That much is very clear. In her understanding of “begotten” and “made”, Ellen White made no profession of

knowing how this was accomplished. This remains therefore, just as Waggoner admitted in his book *Christ and His Righteousness*, a happening unexplainable to man. We can see from all of this that it is not possible to draw the conclusion that in *The Desire of Ages* Ellen White spoke of God as being a trinity, at least not as expressed in the orthodox trinity doctrine or in the version currently held by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

### **Into the 1900s and warnings**

We can see from the above that regarding Christ as a truly begotten Son, Ellen White endorsed and supported the views of early Seventh-day Adventists. We have also seen that she continued this view long after *The Desire of Ages* was published. This means that the Christ she presented in that latter book was a begotten Christ, albeit this begetting was so far back in eternity that it is beyond the human mind to even contemplate it. This then was the early 1900s faith of Seventh-day Adventists. In 1904 Ellen White warned of departing from this faith.

“Be not deceived; many will depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils. We have now before us the alpha of this danger. The omega will be of a most startling nature.” (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Series B, No. 2 page 16, ‘A Letter to Leading Physicians’, July 24th 1904, ‘Teach the Word’*)

Seventh-day Adventists were being warned not to depart from what was then, in 1904, their denominational faith. If this is not what she was doing then the warning does not make sense. This faith that she said they were not to depart from was the begotten faith that we have seen so clearly expressed above and in previous sections. Ellen White also wrote in 1904

“Living Temple” contains the alpha of these theories. I knew that the omega would follow in a little while; and I trembled for our people.” (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Series B, No. 2 ‘The Foundation of our Faith’ Page 53 1904*)

Note that Ellen White said that the “omega” would appear within Seventh-day Adventism “in a little while”. This she said in 1904, which is over 100 years ago. We must ask therefore, has this “omega” already arrived within Seventh-day Adventism or are we still awaiting its arrival? After all, 100 years is quite a long time.

From the above we can see that Ellen White saw something coming upon Seventh-day Adventists that made her shudder with fear. We must ask therefore, as God’s remnant people, can we today afford to ignore these warnings? She also warned in 1904

“In the book “Living Temple” there is presented the alpha of deadly heresies. The omega will follow, and will be received by those who are not willing to heed the warning God has given.” (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Series B No. 2, page 50, letter, August 7th 1904 ‘Beware’*)

This is quite an attention grabbing statement. There were no ifs or buts about it. Ellen White did say that all those who did not heed the warnings would receive the omega. To every Seventh-day Adventist today, these “omega” testimonies should be a matter of very serious importance.

The word *alpha* means first therefore if Ellen White regarded what Kellogg had written in *The Living Temple* as the first of the heresies to come into Seventh-day Adventism then it is quite apparent she did not regard as a heresy what the church was teaching about Christ. The next year at the 1905 General Conference session at Takoma Park she said to the delegates

“Let not any man enter upon the work of tearing down the foundations of the truth that have made us what we are. God has led His people forward step by step, though there are pitfalls of error on every side. Under the wonderful guidance of a plain "Thus saith the Lord," a truth has been established that has stood the test of trial. When men arise and attempt to draw away disciples after them, meet them with the truths that have been tried as by fire.” (*Ellen G. White to the delegates at the 1905 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Takoma Park, Washington D. C., May 24th 1905, "A Warning against False Theories," MR 760*)

Here at the 1905 General Conference, whilst the Seventh-day Adventist Church was still a non-trinitarian denomination, Ellen White was telling its members that their faith (beliefs) as they held it then was the truth that “step by step” God Himself had given to them. She also said that it had “stood the test of trial” and had “been tried as by fire”. Many attempt to say that Ellen White was only making reference here to what was believed by Seventh-day Adventists concerning the sanctuary but this is far from being the truth. We shall see this now.

After appropriately quoting from God’s message to the church at Sardis (this was with respect to holding fast to the faith that they then had) Ellen White said

“Those who seek to remove the old landmarks are not holding fast; they are not remembering how they have received and heard.” (*Ibid*)

In principle, this is exactly what God said to the believers at Sardis (see Revelation 3:1-6). Just as they were told to hold on to their faith, so too Seventh-day Adventists in 1905 were being told to hold on to what they then believed. She continued

“Those who try to bring in theories that would remove the pillars of our faith concerning the sanctuary or concerning the personality of God or of Christ, are working as blind men. They are seeking to bring in uncertainties and to set the people of God adrift without an anchor.” (*Ibid*)

Here we can see that these “pillars” included not only what was then believed

concerning the sanctuary, but also what was then believed regarding the separate **personalities of God and Christ**. This simply means that regarding what Seventh-day Adventists believed in 1905 concerning both God and Christ, Ellen White did include in the “foundations of the truth that have made us what we are” (see above). This included the begotten faith concerning Christ. Today we have given up this faith therefore we have not heeded the warnings. This must mean we have been “giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils” (see above). It can only be concluded therefore that amongst us we have “the omega” (see above).

### Summary of the omega warnings

In summary it can only be reiterated that in these omega warnings, Seventh-day Adventists were being warned **not to depart from their 1904 denominational faith**. This was the faith that said that because He was begotten of God in eternity, Christ is truly the divine Son of God. Today in current Seventh-day Adventism, with the acceptance of a certain version of the trinity doctrine, this is denied. As Dr. Fernando Canale said with reference to the begotten concept of Christ (he wrote the section on the theology of God in the Seventh-day Adventist Handbook of Theology)

“In a similar vein, monogenes does not contain the idea of begetting but rather of uniqueness and, when applied to Christ, emphasizes His unique relationship with the Father. On the other hand, Hebrews 1:5 gives no idea of physical or spiritual generation.” (*Fernando Canale, Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia, Volume 12, page 125, ‘The doctrine of God’*)

His conclusion is

“There is, therefore, no ground within the biblical understanding of the Godhead for the idea of a generation of the Son from the Father.” (*Ibid*)

As can be seen from the above, early Seventh-day Adventists, including Ellen White, would not have agreed with Canale. They saw plenty of grounds for believing that Christ is begotten. They really did believe that Christ is the divine Son of God and that God really is His Father. As Ellen White said in 1908 (10 years after *The Desire of Ages*; was published)

“God is the Father of Christ; Christ is the Son of God. To Christ has been given an exalted position. He has been made equal with the Father. All the counsels of God are opened to His Son.” (*Ellen G. White, 8th Volume Testimonies, page 268, ‘The essential knowledge’*)

### The ultimate risk

Ellen White made many statements that can only be regarded as non-trinitarian; none more so than where she says that the Son of God, by becoming incarnate, could have sinned and by doing so would have lost His eternal existence. We shall look at some of those statements now. In her supposedly trinitarian book

*The Desire of Ages* she wrote

“Satan in heaven had hated Christ for His position in the courts of God. He hated Him the more when he himself was dethroned. He hated Him who pledged Himself to redeem a race of sinners. 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'*)

Who was it here that God allowed to come into the world to face life's peril as every human being to face it, meaning “at the risk of failure and eternal loss? It was “His [God's] Son”. This again shows that Ellen White was not a trinitarian. No trinitarian would believe such a thing. This is because trinity theology forbids this reasoning.

“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.” (*Ibid page 131, 'The victory'*)

Here we are being told that it is only when we realise what was risked and given up by Christ that we can truly appreciate the gospel. Note what Ellen White actually said. She said that when the redeemed stand “with the redeemer” we shall “remember” that Christ “took the risk of failure and eternal loss”. If we are to remember this truth at the time that we enter into Heaven, then it is only too obvious that we must have known it before we got there.

The very same year that *The Desire of Ages* was published Ellen White wrote

**“Could Satan in the least particular have tempted Christ to sin, he would have bruised the Saviour's 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*)

This is very plain speaking not easily misunderstood. It is also something that no true trinitarian believes. This is because in trinity theology, Christ losing His existence is a total impossibility. We can see therefore that in *The Desire of Ages* as well as other places, Ellen White never spoke of Christ in a trinitarian sense but one that was non-trinitarian (trinitarians would say anti-trinitarian). This is just one of the reasons why neither she nor *The Desire of Ages* can ever be truly

termed trinitarian. Three years previous to the publication of *The Desire of Ages* Ellen White wrote

“Who can estimate the value of a soul? Go to Gethsemane, and there watch with Jesus through those long hours of anguish when he sweat as it were great drops of blood; look upon the Saviour uplifted on the cross; hear that despairing cry, “My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Look upon that wounded head, the pierced side, the marred feet. Remember that Christ risked all; “tempted like as we are,” he staked even his own eternal existence upon the issue of the conflict. Heaven itself was imperiled for our redemption. At the foot of the cross, remembering that for one sinner Jesus would have yielded up his life, we may estimate the value of a soul.” (*Ellen G. White, General Conference Bulletin 1st December 1895 ‘Seeking the Lost’*)

In this General Conference Bulletin (which was in fact a week of prayer reading for that year) notice what it was that Ellen White was asking of Seventh-day Adventists. It was not only to remember that Christ could have sinned but also that in the consequence of this happening, He could have lost His “own eternal existence”. It was the pre-existent divine Son of God that risked “his own eternal existence” in becoming incarnate. This shows us how much He and the Father love us. It also shows us that Ellen White was not a trinitarian.

In 1895, this was the generally accepted belief within Seventh-day Adventism. This was certainly not a trinitarian faith. It seems that in our haste to adopt the trinity doctrine, many Seventh-day Adventists have already forgotten this wonderful truth. This is even before they get to Heaven. In other words, for the sake of speculative philosophy, we, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, have forfeited this truth. This statement was made the same year that she made her begotten (not created or adopted) and made statements (see above).

Interesting is that when this reading was transposed into Christ’s Object Lessons (1900) in the chapter called *This man receiveth Sinners*, the wording “tempted like as we are,” he staked even his own eternal existence upon the issue of the conflict” was not included.

In a letter written **two years after** *The Desire of Ages* had been published, Ellen White wrote of Christ (the year that Christ’s Object Lesson was published)

“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, as quoted in the Seventh-day Adventists Bible Commentary Volume 7 page 926*)

From the above, we can readily see that not only did Ellen White believe that Christ was a separate personality from God but also, if He had sinned He would have lost both His “divine attributes” and His “eternal Existence”. This was even though, in His pre-existence, He was God. Again we see that in 1900, Ellen



White was not a trinitarian.

It is only within a non-trinitarian faith that the conclusion can be drawn that Christ could have gone out of existence. Trinitarianism totally forbids this reasoning. Ellen White also wrote in 1893

“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, p. 11, Diary entry for Sunday, July 2, 1893, Wellington, New Zealand*)

This is a mind-blowing realisation. Can we possibly imagine how God the Father would have felt if His Son had sinned and had been lost forever? How would you feel if this were to happen to one of your loved ones? It must be remembered here that there were not two Christ's. There was only one. If this one Christ had not come out of the tomb, then the divine pre-existent Son of God would have ceased to be. The incarnate Christ was indeed the divine Son of God.

### **No Existence separate from the Father**

In 1890, five years before she would write her begotten and made statements (see above), Ellen White wrote

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." Christ came to the world to reveal the character of the Father, and to redeem the fallen race. The world's Redeemer was equal with God. His authority was as the authority of God. He declared that he had no existence separate from the Father. The authority by which he spoke, and wrought miracles, was expressly his own, yet he assures us that he and the Father are one." (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald 7th Jan 1890, 'Christ revealed the Father'*)

Notice the words "He declared". This said Ellen White is Christ's own personal testimony. This was that "He had no existence separate from the Father". This is alluding to the begotten concept, meaning that Christ is sourced of the Father. This is also in keeping with where she said

"Man may become a partaker of the divine nature; not a soul lives who may not summon the aid of Heaven in temptation and trial. Christ came to reveal the Source of his power, that man might never rely on his unaided human capabilities." (*Ellen G. White, Review & Herald 18th February 1890, 'How to meet a controverted point of doctrine'*)

Her Ellen White was referring to Christ in His pre-existence. She said that He came to "reveal the Source of his power". Wherever we go in the writings of

Ellen White, we cannot get away from the fact that she always writes in terms of Christ as being begotten of the Father, the one and only begotten Son of God. This is how it was all through the late 1890s as the turn of the century approached and when in the early 1900s Ellen White gave the warnings not to depart from their God given faith.

## **The Begotten Series**

### **Section Ten**

#### **Current Seventh-day Adventist theology**

We shall see in this final section of the Begotten Series that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has now rejected the belief that Christ is the pre-existent begotten Son of God. Instead they say that just like the Father, He is unbegotten and is therefore not a son, at least, not in His pre-existence.

## The unbegotten role-playing Godhead

The Seventh-day Adventists who say that prior to the incarnation Christ was not begotten, believe that He is one of three divine beings (all un-begotten), who, in the plan of redemption, took on different roles. These roles are the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is said therefore that the three persons of the Godhead are all equal and that in the redemption of mankind from sin they are only acting a part (role-playing or pretending). This means that according to current Seventh-day Adventist theology, the Father is not really a father and the Son is not really a son, at least not in any sense prior to the incarnation. Certainly in this theology, the Son is not, in His pre-existence, the literal Son of God.

The Son therefore, in His pre-existence, is often referred to by Seventh-day Adventists today as the Second Person of the Godhead. This is simply to distinguish Him from Persons one and three who are supposedly both alike. This is just as Person number two is alike with the latter two persons. In other words, according to Seventh-day Adventist theology, there is no difference between the three personages of the Godhead, at least not prior to the incarnation.

To better understand this theology, we need to look at certain statements that project this belief.

One such statement can be found in an article called *Is Jesus Jehovah God?* This was published in the *Ministry* magazine, a monthly Seventh-day Adventist publication for their ministry and bi-monthly for ministers of other denominations. The article in question - published in June 1982 - was written by a retired Seventh-day Adventist minister.

*“The Father, Son relationship in the New Testament, must always be understood in the light of the event of Bethlehem. The only child born into this world with a divine rather than a human father is Jesus. The title ‘son’ refers to His entry into time and does not deny at all His eternal origins. There are references in the Old Testament to ‘Sonship’ but these are always in anticipation of the incarnation.” (J. R. Hoffman, *Seventh-day Adventist Minister, Ministry Magazine article ‘Is Jesus Jehovah God?’ June 1982 page 24*)*

It is being emphasised here that the Father-Son relationship has no application to Christ’s pre-existence. Rather it is said only to be terminology made applicable by the events of the incarnation.

In the 1980s (exact date unknown), during a sermon recorded when conducting a series of evangelistic meetings, Hoffman reiterated this very same thought. This cassette tape (acquired through the ABC), like the *Ministry* article, is also called *Is Jesus Jehovah God?* In this sermon, Hoffman says that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have all eternally co-existed together. He also says (note the

deliberate avoidance of the word son in relation to the pre-existence Christ)

“The Scriptures teaches and the Christian faith sustains, that there were three persons in heaven and that by the decision of the holy trinity, the second person of the Godhead, elected by His own choice (He was not drafted, Paul said He volunteered), he came down into this world and was born in the womb of the blessed virgin at Bethlehem. The only person who was born into this world without an earthly father, is our Lord Jesus Christ”  
(*J. R. Hoffman, ABC Cassette tape, 'Is Jesus Jehovah God?'*)

Hoffman then asks his listeners if they are ready for a conclusion. Here it is

“The second person is the Son of the first person only because of what happened in Bethlehem. The second person is the Son of the first person only because of what happened here in this world. Only person born without an earthly father. He was a child of the Heavenly Father. This applies to his earthly nature, but it has no context whatsoever with His eternal nature.” (*Ibid*)

Hoffman concludes

“In His eternal nature, the second person was not the child of the first person. He is the child of the first person only because of what happened at Bethlehem. How many understand what I am saying here?” (*Ibid*)

It is only reasonable to assume that we would all realise what Hoffman was saying even though we may not all agree with it.

As we pointed out in section six, John wrote his gospel to show that Jesus really was the Son of God but he made no reference to the virgin birth or the events of Bethlehem. If Christ is only deemed a son because of the incarnation, then you would have thought that John would have given it a mention, not try to prove it by what Christ said and did during the three and a half years of His ministry. In itself, this statement of Hoffman's is an indisputable denial, by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, that He who is called in the Scriptures the Son of God is not, in His pre-existence, really a son. According to this theology, the term son, with reference to Christ, is only applicable because of the events of the incarnation. This could be thought of as a form of adoptionism.

This theory of Hoffman's is based on the reasoning that before coming to earth, the Son was not begotten and therefore cannot be described as being God from God. Hoffman also said in his article in the Ministry Magazine (this was with reference to the Greek *monogenes*)

“John 3:16 clearly states that the Son was "begotten" (K.J.V.). This is the same word used to convey the idea of giving birth or existence. This unfortunate translation of the word *monogenes* is one that no modern translation of the Bible has perpetuated. *Monogenes* means "unique, one of a

kind." "To be only begotten" would call for using a different Greek word." (J. R. Hoffman, *Seventh-day Adventist Minister, Ministry Magazine* article 'Is Jesus Jehovah God?' June 1982, page 24)

There are a number of statements here that need addressing, one of which says that the word begotten translated from the Greek *monogenes* conveys the idea of giving birth or existence. This is the thought that our studies have centred on as we progressed through this Begotten Series. As we have also seen, this is not a wrong thought exactly but is rather what *monogenes* implies, meaning that there has to be the producing of a child to be able to have a parent/child relationship (an unique son or daughter). We also noted in section two and section three that the early Greek speaking church fathers believed that Christ was literally begotten of the Father.

Hoffman also says that begotten is an unfortunate translation of the Greek word *monogenes*. It can only be assumed therefore that he accepts that this is the word used in the various manuscripts. He says though that this mistranslation has been corrected of late because (as he puts it) "no modern translation of the Bible has perpetuated" the idea of Christ literally begotten.

Interesting to note is that the New KJV which was published the very same year that Hoffman made this statement, did retain, as applicable to Christ, the word begotten. This latter version is often referred to as a literal or complete equivalence (generally word for word) and not a dynamic equivalence (thought for thought) translation as is the New International Version. It must be said though that no matter how literal a translation is intended, because of language difficulties, there must be a certain amount of thought for thought translating.

By the translators of the NKJV, the use of the word begotten followed the example of a multitude of previous translations. Apart from the original KJV, these were such as the Wesley translation (1755), Mace (1722), the Geneva Bible (1587), Greens literal translation, the Douay-Rheims (1582), the Bishops Bible (1568), the Miles Coverdale translation (1535), Tyndale's New Testament (1525) and the Peshitta-Lamsa edition (1933). Interestingly again, the Darby translation of 1871, translated in response to a 19th century call for a new and accurate translation of the Bible, also used the word begotten with regards to Christ. By some, this translation is still considered today to be one of the most accurate translations of the Bible. Young's literal translation (1862), which is said to be a word for word translation from the Hebrew and Greek, also used the word begotten. Webster's Bible also used the word begotten in respect to Christ. The latter is very interesting because Webster's intent was to correct and make easy any difficulties found in the KJV.

Even translations that do not retain the word begotten, translate this word as something like, only son or one and only son. In other words, with respect to the word *monogenes*, the parent/child relationship is still retained. In all the verses where *monogenes* is used with respect to Christ, William Tyndale, in his

translation of the New Testament, did not always use the word begotten but he did put in its place “only sonne” (only son). As we progress through this section, we shall see that within Seventh-day Adventism today, this view of Hoffman’s concerning the word begotten is not just the personal thoughts of this one minister.

This means that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has now rejected the very basis of the original and orthodox trinity doctrine, meaning that they do not believe that the Son of God, in His pre-existence, is begotten of the Father. This latter belief, as we have seen in previous sections, was not only the belief of very early Christianity but also early Seventh-day Adventists. Current Seventh-day Adventism therefore rejects these views as error.

There is also something else that needs addressing in that previous statement of Hoffman’s and that is that he said ["To be only begotten" would call for using a different Greek word](#)” (see above). Unfortunately, particularly as far as our studies are concerned, Hoffman does not say what is this other Greek word but if *monogenes* is used wrongly then it must be used wrongly in every other place in the Bible. I say this because every time it is used it is always with reference to a parent/child relationship. This is even when it does not apply to Christ.

Hoffman blames Jerome, the author of the Latin Vulgate for the inclusion of the word begotten into the English versions of the Bible.

[“Why did the translators of the King James Version use the phrase, "only begotten"? They relied heavily in their work on the Latin Vulgate of Jerome. Jerome lived at a time when the Christological controversy was raging in the church. Instead of translating monogenes into the Latin word unicus, meaning "only or unique," Jerome thought to aid the cause of truth by choosing the word unigenitus, meaning "only begotten." He wanted to strengthen the doctrine that the Son was of one substance with the Father.”](#) (*Ibid*)

Here we can see that a Seventh-day Adventist minister is blaming one of the most prolific translators of the Bible for the word begotten being applied to Christ. What is very interesting is that **even before Jerome was born** (ca. AD 347), the begotten concept itself (of Christ) was the faith of early Christianity. It was also the faith of all those at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325 (also before Jerome’s birth). It is obvious therefore that Jerome cannot be the source of the concept itself (see section two and section three). In answer to a question regarding the trinity, Frank Holbrook wrote in 1985 in the *Signs of the Times*

[“It may be inferred from the Scriptures that when the Godhead laid out the plan of salvation at some point in eternity past, They also took certain positions or roles to carry out the provisions of the plan.”](#) (*Pastor Frank B. Holbrook, Signs of the Times, July 1985, ‘Frank answers’*)

This would mean that one person of the Godhead took the role of the Father,

one took the role of the Son and the other took the role of the Holy Spirit. There is obviously speculation when it is said "It may be inferred from the Scriptures". Holbrook also said

"God the Son agreed to step down from His exalted position to be man's Saviour by becoming incarnate. God the Son is truly God, but He became truly human, as well. He is the God-Man. By so doing He became a kind of "second" Adam (see Romans 5:14, last part), the representative head of the race. In this position He could rightfully bear the liabilities of humanity." (*Ibid*)

The terminology "God the Son" is not biblical neither can it be found in the writings of Ellen G. White. The same can be said of the terminology "God-man". Notice that Holbrook says of the incarnate Son that He is "a kind of "second" Adam". No explanation is given of this remark but what we do know is that in the Scriptures our Saviour is described as "the last Adam" not something like one (see 1 Corinthians 15:45).

Another statement that said that the three divine beings of the Godhead were only role-playing can be found in the Seventh-day Adventist week of prayer readings for 1996. In one of the readings, Gordon Jenson who was then President of the Spicer Memorial College in Pune India said

"A plan of salvation was encompassed in the covenant made by the Three Persons of the Godhead, who possessed the attributes of Deity equally. In order to eradicate sin and rebellion from the universe and to restore harmony and peace, one of the divine Beings accepted, and entered into, the role of the Father, another the role of the Son." (*Gordon Jenson, Adventist Review, October 31, 1996, p.12 Week of Prayer readings, 'article 'Jesus the Heavenly Intercessor)*

Here we can see it said that in the plan of redemption, two of the three persons of the Godhead, both equal in divine attributes, agreed to role-play certain parts. One would assume that this role-playing is like actors playing parts in a drama thus the three divine beings pretended to be what they were not. To put it another way, the one whom we know as the Father is not really a father and the one whom we know as the Son is not really a son. This would mean that they are pretending to be these things.

Jenson also said

"The remaining divine Being, the Holy Spirit, was also to participate in effecting the plan of salvation. All of this took place before sin and rebellion transpired in heaven." (*Ibid*)

According to Jenson's statement, the Holy Spirit did not role-play anything. He seemingly played Himself. Please note that this was in an article in the week of prayer readings for 1996, just 12 years ago. This means that it is very recent Seventh-day Adventist theology.

## Other recent publications

This same thought that Christ, in His pre-existence is not begotten and is only called a son because of the events of Bethlehem, is echoed throughout certain books that have recently come off the presses of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We are going to make reference to two of these here. These two publications were both published in an attempt to explain the Seventh-day Adventist rendering of the trinity doctrine. They are called *Understanding the Trinity* written by Max Hatton, a retired Seventh-day Adventist minister living in Australia and *The Trinity*, co-authored by Woodrow Whidden, Jerry Moon and John Reeve.

Interesting to note is that the Seventh-day Adventist Church describes *Understanding the Trinity* as being the best defence of the trinity doctrine in the last fifty years. As well as on the rear cover of the book, this can be seen in its advertising literature such as in the ABC catalogue. It must be assumed therefore that the Godhead concepts found in this book are now the accepted theology of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This assumption is based upon the reasoning that it would be totally unreasonable to believe that our church would make this glowing approbation of this book (encouraging its members to believe what it says) whilst at the same time holding a different view than the one it presents. I will now quote to you a part of an email that I received from the editor of the press that printed *Understanding the Trinity*. This was in response to when I made observations to some of the things that were written in it.

“Before they are published, our manuscripts go through a number of stages. One of these is line-by-line evaluation by the BUC Reading Committee of which Pastor Perry is the chairman and I am the secretary. The touchstone of orthodoxy is taken to be the authoritative 'Seventh-day Adventists Believe' (published by the General Conference in 1988 and which, along with many others, I helped to write).” (Email David Marshall to Terry Hill, 29th January 2003)

Here we can see it said that before being published by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the manuscripts of books are given a rigorous examination by a reading committee. This of course is to ensure that they comply with the beliefs as they are set out in our Seventh-day Adventist Believe etc.

Pastor Perry, who as you can see was chairman of this committee, was then the President of the British Union of Seventh-day Adventists whilst the editor of the press that published this book, David Marshall, was its secretary. David Marshall then said concerning *Understanding the Trinity*

“Our Reading Committee that evaluated the Hatton manuscript included a number of theologians and church leaders, including the then principal of Newbold and an (Adventist) university professor from Scotland. In addition, because of its theological nature, the manuscript was also sent to Newbold's



two most senior Bible teachers.”

This is telling us that before *Understanding the Trinity* was published, it underwent at the hands of some of the top echelon of Seventh-day Adventist scholars, a rigorous and gruelling examination. These men included leaders, teachers, theologians, college principals and professors, also because the book was of a theological nature, two of Newbolds most senior Bible teachers. Before it was released for publishing, such was the array of Bible scholars that examined this book.

Strange to relate, when I contacted the General Conference Biblical Research Institute in an effort to persuade them to read my theological paper I was told by Gerhard Pfandl its Associate Director

“Please do not identify the book by my friend and classmate Max Hatton with the official Adventist position on the Trinity. Max has done a good job of presenting his view on the topic, but this does not mean that in every detail this is also the view of the church at large.” (*Email, Gerhard Pfandl to Terry Hill, 22nd February 2005*)

He concluded

“I would suggest that you take into consideration what is found in *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .* and in the *Handbook of SDA Theology* in formulating your objections to the SDA doctrine of the Trinity rather than the book by Max Hatton.” (*Ibid*)

Regardless of what is said here, the book *Understanding the Trinity* was advertised to Seventh-day Adventists as being the best defence of the trinity doctrine in fifty years. This means that throughout the world, Seventh-day Adventists were strongly encouraged to believe what it says. It is also true to say, particularly in the light of the scrutiny that it was given prior to its publication, that it was the accepted view of the trinity by Seventh-day Adventists.

The other book, *The Trinity*, according to its introduction, was published in direct response to the objections that were being made by certain Seventh day Adventists to the trinity doctrine (see pages 7-13 of *The Trinity*). This tells us that our church regards this debate as being serious enough to publish another book directly concerning it.

As well as a theology, this latter book contains a history of the trinity doctrine. This is as it pertains to its origins in Christianity as well as its rejection and eventual acceptance by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It also offers an explanation as to why our pioneers rejected this teaching. We can see from this that both of these books must be taken as being representative of that which the Seventh-day Adventist Church currently teaches concerning the doctrine of the trinity.

In the light of what Pfandl said to me about not regarding Hatton's book as not necessarily in keeping with all that Seventh-day Adventists believe regarding the trinity, I found that his remarks made the next year again a little strange. This is when he wrote in a paper on the trinity debate within Seventh-day Adventism

“Because of a resurgence of anti-Trinitarian views within the church, two books on the Trinity have been published in recent years: Max Hatton's book *Understanding the Trinity* (Grantham: Autumn House, 2001) does not address the Adventist situation, but focuses on the biblical material and responds to attacks on the doctrine of the Trinity. W. W. Whidden, J. Moon, and J. W. Reeve's book *The Trinity* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2002) has two chapters by Jerry Moon dealing with anti-Trinitarianism in Adventism.” (Gerhard Pfandl, Footnote, *The Doctrine of the Trinity Among Seventh-day Adventists*, 2006, page 160)

Here we can see it said that *Understanding the Trinity* was published for the specific purpose of dealing with the trinity debate within Seventh-day Adventism, at least regarding its theology whilst the book *The Trinity*, unlike Hatton's book, included the history of the trinity debate within our church.

Before we proceed to look at some of the things that are written in these two publications, there is one thing that must be made very clear. This is that there is no denying that every individual, no matter who they may be, should be allowed their own personal views regarding this topic without the suggestion that their understanding of it reflects their relationship with God. What must not be done with their views, because they differ with the ones that we may personally hold, is to use them to question that relationship.

I am sure that regarding this complex subject of the trinity, if Seventh-day Adventists in general were questioned about their beliefs, this would portray a multitude of different views. This does not mean that their relationship with God is faulty neither does it imply that it is suspect. This is no more than it can be said that because our pioneers were anti-trinitarian that their relationship with God was faulty or was suspect. Without having their personal relationship with God brought into question, each individual has the right to his or her own views regarding any doctrine regardless of what it may be. In other words, towards those whose views differ to ours concerning this topic, we should be generous and not judge.

My personal dispute concerning the trinity doctrine is not with any individual. It is with the fact that the theology expressed in these books/articles etc is now considered to be, by the leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, in harmony with the Scriptures and with the writings of Ellen White. It is on the basis of this claim that I make my objections and not on the fact that certain individuals hold to this theology. To put this in another way, my dispute is with the Seventh-day Adventist Church for encouraging Seventh-day Adventists to

believe their current theology. It is not with any author for promoting or believing it.

Concerning the word begotten, we shall now note some of the things said in both *Understanding the Trinity* and *The Trinity*.

### **Begotten as in *Understanding the Trinity***

Max Hatton, the author of *Understanding the Trinity*, as does J. R. Hoffman, claims that Christ **became** the Son of God at the incarnation (see page 34 of *Understanding the Trinity*). As I have said before, this seems to me to be a type of adoptionism although the author never disputes that the Son is completely and fully divine. This is the whole point of his book. It is to prove the divinity of Christ and the personhood of the Holy Spirit. As I read through this book, I concluded that the author maintains that rather than in any literal sense, the Sonship of Christ has everything to do with His personal relationship with the Father (see pages 34-39 of *Understanding the Trinity*). On page 97, the author does say emphatically that Jesus is not the literal pre-existent Son of God.

On the same page Hatton also says that the terms Father and Son should only be understood in a metaphorical (figurative) sense and not one that is literal, saying also that those who take the term Son literally should explain how it is literal when there is no mother involved. In brief, our thoughts are returned to the role-playing idea of the persons of the Godhead. On page 96 of this same publication, the author goes to the extent of saying that the words only begotten do not belong in any English translation of the Bible whilst on page 97 he is emphatic in saying that Jesus was neither begotten or created. One is led to believe therefore that as opposed to created, Hatton has a decided view on the meaning of the word begotten but I cannot find anywhere in the book where an explanation is offered (this is assuming he believes there is a difference between these two concepts).

Max Hatton also asks his readers to believe (see pages 96-97 of *Understanding the Trinity*) that the only reason why the words only begotten came to be in the English translation of the Bible is because of a certain tampering of the Bible by a man by the name of Jerome. This is the fourth century translator who is mainly responsible for the Latin Vulgate translation of the Scriptures. This reasoning was the same as J. R. Hoffman's (see above). As we have seen though, the early church fathers who were mainly Greek all spoke of Christ as begotten and was therefore a true son (see section two and section three). It is obviously not possible to blame Jerome for their beliefs because this Bible translator was not even born until around AD 347 (the exact date is unknown). In other words, the things that the early church fathers wrote were written before Jerome was born.

Hatton also says that unfortunately, most other Bible translators followed the example of Jerome and thus the words begotten and only begotten continue to be used in error. He also says on page 95 that Greek scholars are better

informed today and this is why, as a translation of the transliterated Greek word *monogenes*, these scholars do not today use the word begotten. This of course is also in harmony with the reasoning of J. R. Hoffman in his *Ministry* article of June 1982 (see above). I would think because of what we have seen in section two and section three that the early church fathers (who spoke the original Koine) would disagree with him. Greek was their common language. Are we saying today that we know their native language better than they did?

Hatton also explains that whilst the first part of *monogenes* (*monos*) means something like one, the latter part (*genes*) is not derived from *gennao* which he says means to beget, but from *genos* meaning kind or class. He concludes therefore that the word *monogenes* should simply be rendered as something like unique (see page 95-97 of *Understanding the Trinity*). Obviously, if Christ is one of a kind then it must be asked what would make Him different from the Father or the Holy Spirit. It was the reasoning of the early Christian writers that it was because Christ is begotten of the Father whilst the Father was the only unbegotten. Christ therefore was the one and only unique Son of God, unique because He is the only one of His kind (class). In other words, Christ is the only begotten of God.

As we have seen previously in this Begotten Series (see section four), there is certainly credibility in the belief that *monogenes* signifies unique but also, according to other reasoning, does actually convey the thought of the only one brought or come to pass. We have also seen that this allegation of Hatton's regarding the wrong usage of the terms only begotten and begotten must also be applied to Ellen White. This is because she also uses them in exactly the same way that he condemns. Max Hatton also quotes a rendition of the Athanasian Creed, saying that it has served the church well for about two thousand years (see page 14). Whilst this creed was written in the 5th century, thus at the most is only sixteen hundred years old (not 2000), we will accept that by quoting it, the obvious intent of the author is to uphold the original trinity creed as serving the Christian church a purpose.

The strange thing is however, at least this is the way that it seems to me, Max Hatton also says that if the creed was written today it would not say that the Son is begotten (see page 14 of *Understanding the Trinity*). I regard this as strange because the creed of Nicaea on which the Athanasian Creed is based actually says

“The Father is made of none, neither created nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone; not made nor created, but begotten. The Holy Spirit is of the Father and of the Son; neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding”

The words begotten and nor begotten (unbegotten) are an integral and indispensable part of the creed. Without their usage the creed would not make any sense. In other words, remove these words and the entire intent of its meaning would be lost. The word begotten is used here in direct contrast with

the words made, created also not begotten and proceeding. To remove the word begotten therefore would be to totally invalidate the entire sense of its wording.

Note here that in the Athanasian Creed, the Father and the Holy Spirit are specifically described as not begotten and not created. This is in direct contrast to the Son who is distinguished from them both by saying that He is begotten (not created). It can be clearly seen therefore that the entire intent of the wording of this creed is to show that the Son is the only one of the three members of the Godhead who is begotten.

### **A recent rendering of the Nicene Creed**

The Athanasian Creed is based upon the Creed of Nicaea. Hatton claims that if the Athanasian creed were written today it would not contain the word begotten yet the English Language Liturgical Commission (ELLC) has, as recently as the 1980s, completed a translation of the Nicene Creed. This new translation is said to be truer to the original Greek than many other English translations. The whole purpose of the ELLC is to translate as accurately as possible the various creeds and prayers etc. Their recent translation of the Nicene Creed says

*“We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made”. (English Language Liturgical Commission, ‘The Nicene Creed’, ‘Praying Together’ page 9, 1988)*

As a correct translation of the Greek, this well informed and established body of people (ELLC) are still using in this creed the term begotten so if it is true that it should not be said that the Son is begotten, then why was this not recognised by them? Obviously, between these two schools of thought (Hatton’s and the ELLC) there is something seriously amiss.

Now some may ask who or what is the English Language Liturgical Commission? A brief explanation will suffice although obviously because of its brevity it will not be fully explanatory of the purposes of their organisation. Prior to the formation of the ELLC, the work of providing the various churches across the world with up-to-date liturgical forms, which included such as the Nicene Creed, was the responsibility of the International Consultation on English Texts (ICET). In 1983, an ecumenical liturgical consultation was held to determine if the time had come to form another body to supersede the ICET. The outcome was that the ELLC was formed, which in 1985 held their first formal meeting at Boston. It was from this newly formed Commission that emerged the updated translation of the Nicene Creed.

The mission and purpose of the ELLC was to produce liturgy in an adequate form that rendered the Greek and Latin so accurately that it eliminated within the creeds etc, anything that was misleading. In so doing, it was also the purpose and intent of the translating that nothing of the original Greek or Latin should be

lost. Their latest translation of the Nicene Creed can be found on page 9 of their publication *Praying Together*. I found that a copy of this book was easily purchased from a local Christian bookstore and well worth reading.

So, as we have seen, whilst in their most recent translation of the Nicene Creed the ELLC saw fit to include the term *begotten*; in contrast to this the Seventh-day Adventist Church is encouraging its members to believe today that if the creed were written today, which is the basis of the Athanasian Creed, this term would not be included. As I have already said, there is seemingly something very amiss here, at least there is to me. The implication seems to be that those who wrote the creed of Nicaea are being said to have used the wrong wording, either that or it is being said that the ELLC are misinterpreting the Greek. The former conclusion would be very strange because the formulators of the creed were Greek-speaking people who understood the New Testament Scriptures (originally written in Greek), in their own language. For them there was no need of translating. If the latter is assumed, meaning that the ELLC has misinterpreted the Greek, then this is also quite an allegation.

So it seems that whichever of these conclusions are drawn, there are serious implications to be recognised. These obviously need investigation.

### **Problematic theology**

Max Hatton correctly recognizes (see page 130 of *Understanding the Trinity*) that the two heretical views that confronted the early church concerning the Godhead was (a) the belief of Sabellius who supposedly said that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were just different modes of the one personality (Modalism) and (b) the belief that God was three separate beings (Tritheism). Having said this though, there is a problem that needs to be surmounted, at least by those such as the Seventh-day Adventists who say that the Son of God is not begotten. This is because in saying that both Modalism (one God in three modes) and Tritheism (three God's) is incorrect (heresy), as well as saying that the Son of God is not begotten, then how does one arrive at the conclusion that the Son (or as some like to call Him the Second Person of the Godhead) is God?

To put it more succinctly, if Modalism, Tritheism and begotten are all wrong views, then how can the Son of God be said to be God? Seventh-day Adventism resolves this problem by saying that the three unbegotten members of the Godhead are all part of one indivisible triune substance (structure) called God. This is the glue that makes the three divine persons the one God.

In reality, this concept of the three persons in one substance is the very same concept that makes those who believe it trinitarian. In other words, if the concept of one substance (one structure) is not believed, then he or she who does not believe it is not a trinitarian. The difference between the orthodox theology and that of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is that the former says that the Son is begotten of God whilst the latter says that the Son is not begotten but belongs to this one triune structure termed God.

## **Begotten and the book *The Trinity***

In the recent Seventh-day Adventist publication *The Trinity*, just as in *Understanding the Trinity*, it says that Jesus in His pre-existence was not literally the Son of God. In chapter six, namely Biblical Objections to the Trinity, Woodrow Whidden refers to what he calls problem texts that some say deny the trinity doctrine. Two he quotes are John 3:16 and John 17:3. He says in conclusion

“Is it not quite apparent that the problem texts become problems only when one assumes an exclusively literalistic interpretation of such expressions as “Father,” “Son,” “Firstborn,” “Only Begotten,” “Begotten,” and so forth? Does not such literalism go against the mainly figurative or metaphorical meaning that the Bible writers use when referring to the persons of the Godhead? Can one really say that the Bible writers meant such expressions as “the only true God” and “one God the Father” to exclude the full deity of the Son, Christ Jesus?” (*Woodrow Whidden, The Trinity, ‘Biblical objections to the trinity’ page 106, 2002*)

Note first of all that Whidden is saying that problems only arise when the expressions such as Father, Son and begotten etc are taken literally. In other words (he is saying) the Bible writers only meant these terms to be figurative or metaphorical. Note very importantly that he is not here, as does Max Hatton in *Understanding the Trinity*, disputing the inclusion of the word begotten into the English Scriptures.

There is something that is really very important to note here. This is that on numerous occasions, the Bible writers were actually recording the words spoken by Jesus Himself and His Father. In other words, it was not the Bible writers saying Father and Son but God and Christ. We noted this in detail in section six. I would like you to note here the use of the wording “full deity of the Son, Christ Jesus”.

In much of the literature that I have read, it appears that the Seventh-day Adventist Church often uses this phrase to support the reasoning that the Son is God essentially. They seem to portray the idea that if He is spoken of as being begotten, this actually denies this full deity. This is of course totally opposite to the purposes of the Creed of Nicaea (the basis of the original and orthodox trinity doctrine) that was formulated to show that the Son is God essentially. This therefore, by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, is a denial that the original and orthodox trinity doctrine held across the majority of Christendom today correctly portrays the full deity of the Son.

This means of course (according to Seventh-day Adventist theology) that those who formulated the original creed of Nicaea, as well as those who believe and teach it today, are actually denying the full deity of Christ. Now this does seem very odd because if this were true, then it is also being said that the majority of

Christians who term themselves trinitarians are, because they say the Son is begotten of the Father, denying the full deity of Christ. This of course would include the Roman Catholic Church whose entire theology rests on the begotten concept. This is why in their magazine *This Rock*, which has editorials from many leading thinkers of their faith, it said

“Some Evangelicals, such as John MacArthur, J. Oliver Buswell, and the late Walter Martin, have been abandoning the Trinitarian faith as defined by the First Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325). This abandonment of orthodox Trinitarianism consists in denying the Eternal Sonship of Christ, the doctrine that the Second Person of the Trinity was the Son of God from all eternity. Instead, they claim that the Second Person of the Trinity became the Son of God only at his Incarnation. Apart from the Incarnation he was still God, but not the Son, just the Second Person.” (*This Rock, Roman Catholic Magazine September 1998*)

The reasoning that the Roman Catholic Church is decrying is now the current theology of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The latter says that at the best, Jesus only became a Son from the incarnation and that prior to this, meaning in His pre-existence, He can only be called the Second person of the Godhead. To put it in brief, Seventh-day Adventists today deny the eternal Sonship of Jesus.

The article in the Roman Catholic magazine continued its remarks concerning the teaching that says that Christ is not begotten

“This teaching destroys the internal relationships within the Trinity, because if the Son was not eternally begotten by the Father then neither did the Spirit eternally proceed from the Father through the Son. It also destroys the Fatherhood of the First Person, since without a Son there is no Father.” (*Ibid*)

It then says

“Thus the fundamental relations among the Persons of the Godhead are destroyed and replaced by mere social relationships, a bare existence of three Persons in the Godhead. Prior to the Incarnation, there is no longer the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, but simply Number One, Number Two, and Number Three - the numbers themselves being an arbitrary designation.” (*Ibid*)

First of all note here the phrase “in the Godhead”. This could make the word Godhead to appear something very similar to the word *trinity*. The truth of the matter is that these two words are not even similar. The word Godhead, as translated in the KJV (Acts 17:29, Romans 1:20 and Colossians 2:9), means pertaining to divinity but does not include the idea of three in one as does the word *trinity*. I have never found anywhere in the writings of Ellen White where she uses the phrase in the Godhead. All that I can find is where she says of the Godhead (of divinity). Regarding this quote though, how true this is of the



Seventh-day Adventist idea of the trinity. By replacing it with persons designated by only a number (No.1 and No.2), it destroys the real father and son relationship.

When reasoned through, does it make sense to say that those today that confess the original trinity creed, as well as the millions of orthodox trinitarians who in ages past have believed it, are actually denying the full deity of Christ? This really is something that we need to very carefully reason through because it is quite an allegation, especially against such ardent trinitarians as Roman Catholics and Anglicans etc.

I say this because in an address on March 19th 1999 in St. Peter's Square, the late Pope John Paul II said of Christ's relationship with the Father

*"This essential union with the Father not only accompanies Jesus' activity, but defines his whole being. . The Incarnation of God's Son reveals that God is the eternal Father and that the Son is consubstantial with the Father, which means that, in the Father and with the Father, the Son is one and the same God" (Pope John Paul II, Address to an audience in St. Peter's Square, Vatican Information Service March 10th 1999)*

Here can be seen the very principle of the doctrine of the trinity. This is that the Son is consubstantial with the eternal Father. This is the one belief that makes a person a trinitarian without which this claim cannot be made. The Pope then said

*"The Evangelist John stresses that it is precisely to this divine claim that the religious leaders of the people react, for they cannot tolerate him calling God his Father and therefore making himself equal to God (Jn 5: 18; cf. 10: 33; 19: 7).*

This was also the same conclusion as we drew previously when we spoke of the claims of Jesus as being the "I AM". The pope concludes (and this is what is relevant to our study on begotten)

*"Starting with the Son, New Testament reflection and the theology based on it have plumbed the mystery of God's "fatherhood". It is the Father who is the absolute principle in Trinitarian life, the one who has no origin and from whom the divine life flows. The unity of the three Persons is a sharing in the one divine essence, but in the dynamism of reciprocal relations that have their source and foundation in the Father. "It is the Father who generates, the Son who is begotten, and the Holy Spirit who proceeds" (Fourth Lateran Council: DS 804)." (Ibid)*

This begotten concept is the integral part of the creed. It is that which makes Christ a true Son. It is this being begotten of the Father that in trinity orthodoxy makes the Son to be full and complete deity. Notice that Pope John Paul also said that the relations in the trinity have their source in the Father whose life is

the principle of it.

All of this of course the Seventh-day Adventist Church denies by saying that God is not literally the Father of Christ and that Christ is not literally the Son of God, instead they say that along with the Holy Spirit, they are simply three individual beings in one trinity type structure of God. We have also seen that the Seventh-day Adventist ministry also says that these three persons of the Godhead are not literally Father, Son and Holy Spirit but are role-playing (pretending) to be as such.

### **Strange statements**

In the book, *The Trinity* (see previous quote from this book above), Woodrow Whidden is suggesting that the Bible writers never meant these expressions begotten, only begotten, Father, Son etc to be taken literally, obviously (according to him) it would deny the full deity of Christ. Seventh-day Adventists are saying today exactly the opposite of the Nicene Creed. They are saying that if in His pre-existence the Son is considered begotten, then it *robs Him* of His full and complete deity (a form of Arianism they say). This does appear to be rather strange seeing that the original trinity doctrine, which totally depends on the begotten concept, was specifically formulated to defeat Arianism.

In the book *The Trinity* with reference to the word *monogenes* (begotten), Woodrow Whidden says

“Far from suggesting that the Father generated or begat the Son as some sort of derived or created semigod, the imagery of Father and Son points to the eternal and profound intimacy that has always existed between the first and second persons of the Godhead as divine “equals” through all eternity (past, present, and future)” (*Woodrow Whidden, ‘The Trinity’ page 97, chapter ‘Biblical Objections to the trinity’, 2002*)

According to Whidden, the terms Father and Son only reveal the intimacy between these two personalities who are supposedly role-playing these parts. This leaves one to wonder what the term Holy Spirit reveals. Does He not have an intimacy of a relationship with the other two divine personalities? Why is He not regarded as begotten? Notice here that Whidden implies that when taken as literally begotten, *monogenes* would mean that the Son would be “some sort of derived or created semigod” (meaning it is assumed a derived or lesser god). He also says on page 101 with regards to such terms as God calling Christ My Son, begotten and firstborn,

“The anti-Trinitarians are quick to give these terms a very literal interpretation in the sense that Christ is a ‘truly’ “begotten, firstborn Son” generated by the Father. Thus they conclude that Christ is a “god” of lesser deity and dignity than the eternal Father.” (*Ibid 101*)

This again I find is an extremely strange statement because obvious to relate, the orthodox trinity doctrine that has as its basis the Creed of Nicaea is

completely dependant on the Son being begotten. Thus it is being said, by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, that those who compiled and contributed so much to it are actually anti-trinitarians. This really is a very strange concept to accept!

I would also say that those such as Athanasius who originally contributed so much to the formulation of orthodox trinity doctrine and who said that the Son was begotten, would, I believe, object most strongly to the suggestion that their creed (the creed of Nicaea) actually portrayed the Son as some sort of “[derived or created semigod](#)”. Certainly they would object to being told that they had created something that was “[a “god” of lesser deity](#)” than the Father. The whole point of the creed of Nicaea, also as well as all the other creeds that followed, was to show that the Son was God in the fullest sense of meaning. This Seventh-day Adventist reasoning therefore I find to be very strange indeed.

I believe also that those today who are holding to the original trinity orthodoxy of a begotten Son would also object to being told that they were actually anti-trinitarian, especially the Roman Catholic Church. For myself I believe as the Bible says that the Son is begotten. As has been seen though, I do not consider the Son of a lesser deity than the Father. This can also be said of the beliefs and teachings of Ellen White and the other pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism who also said that the Son is begotten of God. Whidden is obviously saying that all who believe the Son is begotten of the Father all “[conclude that Christ is a “god” of lesser deity and dignity than the eternal Father](#)”. This would include of course Ellen White. This leads me to conclude that Whidden’s reasoning has gone awry somewhere.

### **Addendum**

It was 10 years ago in 2007 that I wrote this series. I was hoping that by now, 2017, the leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church would have admitted that what our church once taught about Christ – which was that in eternity He was begotten of God therefore He is truly the Son of God – is the truth concerning His pre-existence. Unfortunately they have done exactly the opposite. They have now become more and more entrenched in their rejection of this belief.

Perhaps one article that sums up this present denominational situation was written by Angel Rodriguez, He was once (now retired) the Director of the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference. He wrote an article called *A question of Sonship - What does the Bible mean when it refers to Jesus as “the Son of God”?* It was published in the November 2015 edition of the magazine *Adventist World*. This was in the section *Bible Questions Answered*. In answering this question, also after saying that the angels are sons of God by creation, and that God’s people are sons of God through redemption, he wrote such as

[“Yet He \[Christ\] is a different person. We are dealing with a metaphorical use of the word “son.” \(Angel Rodriguez, Adventist World, November 2015,](#)

*'A question of Sonship - What does the Bible mean when it refers to Jesus as "the Son of God"?)*

Rodriguez is continuing to uphold the belief that the terminologies *Father and Son* are not literal but metaphorical. To this end, under the sub-heading *Metaphorical Significance*, he makes a number of statements. After saying that "the relationship between parents and children is unique", also that their "union is practically indissoluble", he says

"The metaphor [of a child/parent relationship] is therefore a good symbol for the deep unity that exists within the members of the Godhead" (*Ibid*)

We can see that this is a complete denial of the begotten belief. It therefore denies (a) the belief of early Christians, (b) the belief of early Seventh-day Adventists, (c) what we have been told through the spirit of prophecy and (d) a literal understanding of the Scriptures. Rodriguez reiterates this metaphorical understanding of the terminologies *Father and Son* by saying (this was still under the sub-heading *Metaphorical Significance*)

"There is no biblical support for the eternal generation of the Son from the Father.... the father-son image cannot be literally applied to the divine Father-Son relationship within the Godhead. The Son is not the natural, literal Son of the Father.... The term "Son" is used metaphorically when applied to the Godhead" (*ibid*)

This could not be stated more plainly. This is a total rejection of the belief that Christ is truly the Son of God. It reduces these two divine persons as just role-playing (acting) the parts of Father and Son. Such is Seventh-day Adventism today.

## **Summary**

There is much more that I would like comment on regarding these current publications of the Seventh-day Adventist Church but it would be too much for this section. Suffice to say that the current theology of the Seventh-day Adventist Church claims that the Son of God, in His pre-existence, was not begotten therefore He is not, in His pre-existence, a son. This is in total contrast to what was believed by the early Christians, also by the pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. They all believed in the true Sonship of Jesus.

As we close this Begotten Series, it would be beneficial to look at two statements from the Spirit of Prophecy. The first says

"The more we think about Christ's becoming a babe here on earth, the more wonderful it appears. How can it be that the helpless babe in Bethlehem's manger is still the divine Son of God? Though we cannot understand it, we can believe that he who made the worlds, for our sakes became a helpless babe. Though higher than any of the angels, though as great as the Father on

the throne of heaven, he became one with us. In him God and man became one, and it is in this fact that we find the hope of our fallen race. Looking upon Christ in the flesh, we look upon God in humanity, and see in him the brightness of divine glory, the express image of God the Father." (*Ellen G. White, The Youth's Instructor 21st November 1895 'Child life of Jesus No. 1'*)

Note that Ellen White said, "How can it be that the helpless babe in Bethlehem's manger is still the divine Son of God? Here we can see that Ellen White believed that in His pre-existence, Jesus was the literal Son of God. As we have seen, this is in direct contrast to the reasoning of Reynolds Hoffman, Max Hatton, Woodrow Whidden, Angel Rodriguez and all the others who say on behalf of the Seventh-day Adventist Church that in His pre-existence, Christ was not a literal Son.

Another quote from the Spirit of Prophecy that says that in His pre-existence Christ was truly a son was made in 1905. This is when Ellen White said (note that this was 7 years after the publication of *The Desire of Ages*)

"Christ brought men and women power to overcome. He came to this world in human form, to live a man amongst men. He assumed the liabilities of human nature, to be proved and tried. In His humanity He was a partaker of the divine nature. In His incarnation He gained in a new sense the title of the Son of God. Said the angel to Mary, "The power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). While the Son of a human being, He became the Son of God in a new sense. Thus He stood in our world--the Son of God, yet allied by birth to the human race. (*Ellen G. White, Selected Messages book 1 page 226 also Signs of the Times August 2nd 1905*)

Here we are told that "in a new sense" the Son of God again became a son.

In section two of this series, we quoted from a letter that Alexander wrote (he was the one who along with Athanasius opposed Arius and helped to formulate the creed at Nicaea which became the basis of the trinity doctrine). In this letter he said

"And accordingly we believe that the Son proceeded from the Father; for He is the reflection of the glory of the Father, and the figure of His substance. But let no one be led from this to the supposition that the Son is unbegotten, as is believed by some who are deficient in intellectual power: for to say that He was, that He has always been, and that He existed before all ages, is not to say that He is unbegotten." (*Letter from the Bishop of Alexandria to Alexander of Constantinople taken from Theodoret's "Ecclesiastical History," book i, chap. iv. as quoted in A. T. Jones 'The Two Republics Page 333*)

We can see here that Alexander, who along with Athanasius was the main progenitor of the trinity doctrine, denies that the Son of God is not begotten. He

also says that to say that He is begotten does not deny that He has always existed. Note also that he says that those who say that the Son is unbegotten are, as one translation puts it, “deficient in intellectual power”. Such was the importance that the early Christian writers placed on the belief that the Son of God is begotten of the Father. This begotten faith was the faith of early Christianity. It was also the faith of our pioneers including Ellen White. Today the Seventh-day Adventist Church denies this faith. No longer do they teach that Christ is the pre-existent Son of God. As Fernando Canale summarises it in the official Seventh-day Adventist handbook of Theology

“There is, therefore, no ground within the biblical understanding of the Godhead for the idea of a generation of the Son from the Father.” (*Fernando Canale, Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia, Volume 12, page 125, ‘The doctrine of God’*)

Obviously not everyone would agree!