

Ellen White's comments on the incarnation of Christ and the risk taken concerning His existence

Exiled from the Father

"It is important that we each study to know the reason of the life of Christ in humanity, and what it means to us, -- why the Son of God left the courts of heaven,-- why he stepped down from his position as Commander of the heavenly angels, who came and went at his bidding,-- why he clothed his divinity with humanity, and in lowliness and humility came to the world as our Redeemer." (Ellen G. White, *Youth's Instructor*, 21st January 1897, 'Christ's Mission to Earth')

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"A way is opened before everyone in the office to engage from the heart directly in the work of Christ and the salvation of souls. Christ left heaven and the bosom of His Father to come to a friendless, lost world to save those who would be saved. He exiled Himself from His Father and exchanged the pure companionship of angels for that of fallen humanity, all polluted with sin." (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies Volume 3*, page 190, 'Laborers in the Office')

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

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"Christ stepped down from his exalted throne, left the royal courts, clothed his divinity with humanity, and became a man among the children of men; he humbled himself even to the suffering and death of the cross, that man might be exalted, that man might become a partaker of the divine nature, be an overcomer, and have a place with Christ upon his throne in glory." (Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*. 15th June 1891 'He that Hath an Ear, let Him Hear')

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"If Christ had studied his convenience, he would never have left heaven to come to our world to die, to hang upon the accursed tree for us. Jesus has died for you, and now what will you do for Jesus?" (Ellen G. White, *Review & Herald*, 10th June 1890, 'Conditions for Obtaining Eternal Riches')

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

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"Think of how much it cost Christ to leave the heavenly courts, and take his position at the head of humanity. Why did he do this? -- Because he was the only one who could redeem the fallen race. ... The Son of God stepped down from his heavenly throne, laid off his royal robe

and kingly crown, and clothed his divinity with humanity. He came to die for us, to lie in the tomb as human beings must, and to be raised for our justification. He came to become acquainted with all the temptations wherewith man is beset. ” (Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, 9th March 1905, ‘God’s purpose for us’)

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“In all the universe there was but One who could, in behalf of man, satisfy its claims. Since the divine law is as sacred as God Himself, only one equal with God could make atonement for its transgression. None but Christ could redeem fallen man from the curse of the law, and bring him again into harmony with Heaven. Christ would take upon Himself the guilt and shame of sin--sin so offensive to a holy God that it must separate the Father and the Son.” (Ellen G. White, *Signs of the times*, 4th November 1908, ‘When sin entered’, see also, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 63, ‘The Plan of Redemption’)

The ‘sin factor’

“Those who claim that it was not possible for Christ to sin, cannot believe that He took upon Him human nature. Christ was actually tempted, not only in the wilderness, but all through his life. In all points He was tempted as we are, and because He successfully resisted temptation in every form, He gave us a perfect example.” (Ellen G. White, *Bible Echo*, 1st November 1892, ‘Tempted in all points like as we are’, see also *Signs of the Times*, 10th October 1892, ‘Draw from the source of strength’)

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“He could have sinned; He could have fallen, but not for one moment was there in Him an evil propensity. He was assailed with temptations in the wilderness, as Adam was assailed with temptations in Eden.” (Ellen G. White, *Letter 8*, 1895. written to Brother and Sister W. L .H. Baker, North American workers in Australia, probably from Sunnyside, Cooranbong, New South Wales)

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“The temptations to which Christ was subjected were a terrible reality. As a free agent He was placed on probation, with liberty to yield to Satan's temptations and work at cross-purposes with God. If this were not so, if it had not been possible for Him to fall, He could not have been tempted in all points as the human family is tempted.” (Ellen G. White, *Youth’s Instructor*, 26th October 1899, ‘Against principalities and powers’)

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“Our Lord was tempted as man is tempted. He was capable of yielding to temptations, as are human beings.”... The divine nature, combined with the human, made Him capable of yielding to Satan's temptations. To suppose He was not capable of yielding to temptation places Him where He cannot be a perfect example for man, and the force and the power of this part of Christ's humiliation, which is the most eventful, is no instruction or help to human beings.” (Ellen G. White, *MS 57, Diary 1890*, ‘The Humiliation of Christ’, Volume 16 MR No. 1211)

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“Letters have been coming in to me, affirming that Christ could not have had the same nature as man, for if he had, he would have fallen under similar temptations. If he did not have man's nature, he could not be our example. If he was not a partaker of our nature, he could not have been tempted as man has been. If it were not possible for him to yield to temptation, he could not be our helper.” (Ellen G. White, *Review & Herald* 18th February 1890, ‘How to meet a controverted point of doctrine’)

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“He could not have been tempted in all points like as man is tempted had there been no possibility of his failing. He was a free agent, placed on probation, as was Adam and as is man. Unless there is a possibility of yielding, temptation is no temptation.” (Ellen G. White, Manuscript 29, 1899, pp 4, 5. "Sacrificed for Us", typed March 17, 1899, see also 'Youth Instructor, 20th July 1899)

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“Unless he was placed in a position as trying as that in which Adam stood, he could not redeem Adam's failure. If man has in any sense a more trying conflict to endure than had Christ, then Christ is not able to succor him when tempted. Christ took humanity with all its liabilities. He took the nature of man with the possibility of yielding to temptation, and he relied upon divine power to keep him.” (Ellen G. White, General Conference Bulletin, 25th February 1895, 'Extracts from Life of Christ')

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“Christ took human nature upon him, and became a debtor to do the whole law in behalf of those whom he represented. Had he failed in one jot or tittle, he would have been a transgressor of the law, and we would have had in him a sinful, unavailing offering.” (Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 16th January 1896, 'Sin condemned in the flesh')

The 'risk' factor

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

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

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

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

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

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

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“He became subject to temptation, **endangering as it were, His divine attributes.** Satan sought, by the constant and curious devices of his cunning, to make Christ yield to temptation.” (*Ellen G. White, Letter 5, 1900, as quoted in the Seventh-day Adventists Bible Commentary Volume 7 page 926*)

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“To the honor and glory of God, His beloved Son -- the Surety, the Substitute -- was delivered up and descended into the prisonhouse of the grave. The new tomb enclosed Him in its rocky chambers. **If one single sin had tainted His character the stone would never have been rolled away from the door of His rocky chamber,** and the world with its burden of guilt would have perished.” (*Ellen G. White, Ms. 81, 1893, p. 11, Diary entry for Sunday, July 2, 1893, Wellington, New Zealand*)

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“**Our Lord’s trial and test and proving shows that He could yield to these temptations, else the battle was all a farce.** But He did not yield to the solicitude of the enemy, thus evidencing that the human nature of man, united with the divine nature by faith, may be strong and withstand Satan’s temptations....**Our Lord was tempted as man is tempted. He was capable of yielding to temptations, as are human beings.The divine nature, combined with the human, made Him capable of yielding to Satan’s temptations.** Here the test to Christ was far greater than that of Adam and Eve, for Christ took our nature, fallen but not corrupted, and would not be corrupted unless He received the words of Satan in the place of the words of God. **To suppose He was not capable of yielding to temptation places Him where He cannot be a perfect example for man, and the force and the power of this part of Christ’s humiliation, which is the most eventful, is no instruction or help to human beings.**”

But the facts of this history are not fable, but a living, acting, experience. [To deny this] would rob Jesus of His greatest glory—allegiance to God—which enshrouded Him as a garment in this world on the field of battle with the relentless foe, and He is not reckoned with the transgressor.” (*Ellen G. White, Ms 57 1890, ‘Christ’s Humiliation’*)

What if no risk had existed?

Here we must ask the question: What if, in the incarnation, no risk to the pre-existent divine Son of God had existed? What then? Would it make any difference how we view what He did – also to what He achieved in becoming incarnate? I would say yes – most definitely. It would make a difference.

Allow me to share with you an illustration. It is very imaginary but I am sure you will see the point I am making. You will see then why I believe that in order to fully appreciate the gospel, it is important to understand this this risk factor.

Imagine you are out walking and you see ahead of you a house on fire. As you approach the house, crowds are beginning to gather. The mother who lives in the house is frantic. Her two children are in one of the bedrooms. She is screaming for someone to get her children out before it is too late.

Immediately a man in the crowd volunteers. He grabs someone’s coat and dashes into the burning building. Two minutes later he returns with the children beneath the coat. They are saved from the fire. Needless to say, the mother is grateful beyond words.

Everyone, including yourself, is applauding the actions of this man. People are saying that for such an act of bravery he should receive a medal. You look with admiration on the merits of a man who would risk his life in doing such a thing.

As you are contemplating the actions of this man, another onlooker says to you "I suppose like everyone else you admire that man for what he did"? You answer in the affirmative. The man then says "You would not feel that way if you knew what I knew".

Obviously you are intrigued by this man's remarks. You ask him what he means. He replies, "What you do not know is that the man you are admiring is fireproof. There was never any danger of him losing his life".

I did say to you that the story is very imaginary but I believe it conveys a very important point. I will explain what I mean.

Let's assume for a moment that the story is real. How would you now regard the man who had saved the children from the fire? Would you still have such a high regard for him? Would you still see what he did as an act of bravery?

Like everyone else – especially the mother – you may be very glad he was there to rescue the children but the admiration you had for him, because of his 'gallant' actions, would not be the same. How could it be the same? You are now in possession of facts that you were not aware of when you initially assessed this man's actions. It would be impossible to regard him the same as you did previously.

As we have seen from the above statements from the spirit of prophecy, Jesus was not 'fireproof'. He could have failed. He could have sinned. He could have lost His existence. This reveals how much both He and His Father loved (and still loves) the human race. If we say Christ was 'fireproof', then by our reasoning we rob them both of what they were prepared to give up (sacrifice) to save humanity. In other words, we fail to see the depth of their love for humanity.

It was Roy Adams who more than adequately summed up the idea that when Christ was on earth (in the incarnation) there was no risk of Him sinning. In 2008 as Associate Editor of the Review he wrote (my emphasis)

"To say there was no risk in the Incarnation is to argue the biblically untenable position that it was impossible for Jesus to sin. If that were the case, then we'd be into divine playacting of the most cynical kind. And Jesus' 40-day fast in the desert, His all-night prayer vigils, and His agony in Gethsemane would all amount to a cruel farce." (Roy Adams, Advent Review, April 17th 2008, 'An impenetrable mystery')

This just about says everything. If it had not been possible for Christ to fail in His mission (yield to temptation), His entire life, as Adams said, would have been "playacting of the most cynical kind". For Christ's temptations to be real, there had to be a possibility of Him giving into them. As we noted above was said by Ellen White, temptation is only temptation if there is a possibility of yielding to it. If in Christ's life on earth this possibility had not existed, then His life really was a farce.

In all fairness to Roy Adams, it must be pointed out that in his article he did not mention what he thought would have happened to Christ if He had sinned but I did ask him. He replied saying we do not know.

Personally speaking I believe we do know. Our God has graciously pointed this out to us. He has told us that His Son would have lost His existence. This should have an impact on how we view what Christ did in becoming incarnate.

During the time of my research into our present denominational Godhead controversy, I have spoken to many trinitarians concerning this risk factor. None have said that it was impossible for

Christ to have sinned. They have all said He could have sinned. What I find rather strange though is that they all say we do not know what would have happened to Him if He had sinned.

The reason why I say this is strange is because in trinitarianism, 'the one God', as depicted by the trinity doctrine, can never undergo change. Certainly none of the three persons could cease to exist else the 'one God' would cease to exist - which would be impossible. In trinitarian theology therefore, no matter what would have happened in the incarnation, the divine Son of God always remains an integral part of the 'one (triune) God'. Why say therefore that we do not know what would have happened to Him if He had sinned? In trinitarian reasoning, nothing could possibly happen to Him. He can no more undergo change (or cease to exist) than can the 'one (triune) God'.

This 'risk issue' was spoken of many years earlier by another very well known figure in Seventh-day Adventism. This man was Charles Smull Longacre. He wrote in 1947

"If it were impossible for the Son of God to make a mistake or commit a sin, then His coming into this world and subjecting Himself to temptations were all a farce and mere mockery. If it were possible for Him to yield to temptation and fall into sin, then He must have risked heaven and His very existence, and even all eternity." (Charles Smull Longacre, paper titled 'The Deity of Christ' submitted to the Bible Research Fellowship, January 1947)

He concluded the same as I, and many others have done – meaning

"That is exactly what the Scriptures and the Spirit of Prophecy say Christ, the Son of God did do when He came to work out for us a plan of salvation from the curse of sin." (Ibid)

I believe that an honest study of both Scripture and the spirit of prophecy would lead anyone to draw this same conclusion.

Fernando Canale (emeritus professor of theology and philosophy, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University), who in the Seventh-day Adventist Handbook of Theology wrote the treatise 'The Doctrine of God', had the following to say when I asked him how the trinity doctrine was compatible with the idea that if Christ had sinned He would have lost His existence

"God the son could have sinned but he would not have lost his existence. I do not know where you got the idea that sin would have brought the death of the eternal Son of God. God, because he is God cannot die." (Fernando Canale, email to Terry Hill, 14th September 2007)

I acquired the idea (that if Christ had sinned He would have lost His existence) through studying the Scriptures and the spirit of prophecy. As can be seen here, Canale denies that a divine person can die therefore his reasoning is much the same as that of Max Hatton's.

In a following email two days later, Canale reiterated his previous thoughts. After saying that this is a subject which has not been revealed (which was the same as said to me by Roy Adams) he said

"The idea that Christ will not have resurrected if he had sinned seems contradictory to the fact that he has life in itself." (Fernando Canale, email to Terry Hill, 16th September 2007)

It may seem contradictory to human reasoning but as we have seen above, through the spirit of prophecy we have been told (if Christ had sinned), "Divine wrath would have come upon Christ as it came upon Adam. Christ and the church would have been without hope". This subject matter therefore is not a mystery unrevealed. God led Ellen White to write about it. As we have seen from the above, she explained it very clearly. There is no ambiguity in her words.

Conclusion concerning Ellen White and the risk factor

What conclusion can be drawn from what we have seen above was said by Ellen White?

The only conclusion that can be drawn is that Ellen White was not a trinitarian. This is because the trinity doctrine forbids this risk belief. In other words, if God is a trinity as purported in our fundamental beliefs (meaning the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit constitute the 'one God' - therefore they are inseparably connected to each other), then it is impossible for any of the three to lose their eternal existence. Ellen White obviously disagreed with this reasoning. She was definitely not a trinitarian.

Interesting is a remark made by Ella Robinson - the oldest granddaughter of Ellen White.

In an interview with James R Nix (present Director of the Ellen G. White Estate), she spoke of a sermon she had heard her grandmother (Ellen White) preach. She recalled

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

It is evident that those close to Ellen White - those who had heard her preach and those who knew of her beliefs - knew she firmly believed that in the making of the decision for Christ to become incarnate (made flesh), there was a risk taken concerning His eternal existence. As Ella Robinson recalled, Ellen White spoke of Jesus "running the risk of eternal separation from His Father in heaven". This is in keeping with the statements of Ellen White that we have read above. She said that "tempted like as we are," he staked even his own eternal existence upon the issue of the conflict" - also that if Christ had sinned, "the stone would never have been rolled away from the door of His rocky chamber", thus He would never have been resurrected by His Father.

May God bless you as you think on these things.

Terry Hill (UK)

Website: <https://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/>

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