

**CONTRASTING VIEWS ABOUT THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST AND THEIR
IMPACT ON THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY
IN SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST THEOLOGY**

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Introduction

The divinity of Christ was a major topic of discussion during the Early Church. The issue triggered the first and second ecumenical councils decisions regarding the Trinity, including a discussion of Christ's divinity. Paul Tillich states that the "Trinitarian decision in Nicaea preceded the definitely Christological decision of Chalcedon. . . .but in terms of motivation the sequence is reversed; the Christological problem gives rise to the Trinitarian problem."¹ The Councils of Nicaea (325 AD) and Constantinople (381 AD) confirmed the Trinity and divinity of Christ. Thus, since this formative period of Christianity, the divinity of Christ was closely connected to the acceptance of the Trinity.

In the Seventh-day Adventist Church, even though there are some limited works done on the Trinity,² there is comparatively little work on the divinity of Christ, including its connection to the acceptance of the Trinity. This paper identifies different views about the divinity of Christ, and how they impacted the acceptance of the Trinity doctrine in Seventh-day Adventist theology. The following sections identify five different groups regarding their views of the divinity of Christ within Seventh-day Adventist history, especially their relationship to the doctrine of the Trinity.³

Jesus Christ as a Divine but Created Being

¹ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1967), 285.

² Erwin Roy Gane, "The Arian or Anti-trinitarian Views Presented in Seventh-day Adventist Literature and the Ellen G. White Answer," (M.A. thesis, Andrews University, 1963); Hans Varmer, "Analysis of the Seventh-day Adventist Pioneer Anti-Trinitarian Position," (Term paper, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, 1972); Merlin D. Burt, "Demise of Semi-Arianism and Anti-Trinitarianism in Adventist Theology, 1888–1957," (Term paper, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, 1996); Idem, "History of the Adventist View on the Trinity," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 17/1 (Spring 2006): 125–139; Russell Holt, "The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination: Its Rejection and Acceptance," (Term paper, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, 1969); Woodrow W. Whidden, Jerry Moon, and John Reeve, *The Trinity: Understanding God's Love, His Plan of Salvation and Christian Relationships* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2002); Woodrow W. Whidden, "Salvation Pilgrimage: The Adventist Journey into Justification by Faith and Trinitarianism," *Ministry*, April 1998, 5-7; Gerhard Pfandl, "The Doctrine of the Trinity among Seventh-day Adventist," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 17/1 (Spring 2006): 160–179; Jerry Moon, "The Adventist Trinity Debate Part 1: Historical Overview," *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, Vol. 41/1, (2003): 113-129; Idem, "The Adventist Trinity Debate Part 2: The Role of Ellen G. White," *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, Vol. 41/ 2, (2003): 275-292; and Denis Fortin, "God, Trinity and Adventism: An Old Controversy over the Nature of God Surfaces again," *Perspective Digest*, Vol 15 issue 4, (2011) <http://www.perspectivedigest.org/article/17/archives/15-4/god-the-trinity-and-adventism> accessed September 1, 2016.

³ This paper is a revised version of a thesis equivalency (chapter 3) done by the author, Donny Chrissutianto, which was entitled "The Divinity of Christ and Its Relation to the Acceptance of the

Some of the leaders among the early Adventist pioneers believed that Jesus Christ was the Lord, but that He was created by God. Since He was a created being, His substance was different from the Creator, that is, the Father. Supporters of this idea still believed that Jesus Christ was truly a divine being.

J. M. Stephenson wrote in 1854 that Jesus Christ was a divine being. He recognized that “His being the only begotten of the Father supposes that none except him were thus begotten; hence he is, in truth and verity the only begotten Son of God; and as such he must be Divine; that is, be a partaker of the Divine nature.” In spite of Jesus Christ being “immortal,” and “in his original nature, . . . deathless,”⁴ nevertheless, He was not seen to be as immortal as the Father. He continued:

that there are none good except the Father, it cannot be understood that none others are good in a relative sense; for Christ and angels, are good, yea perfect, in their respective sphere; but that the Father alone is supremely, or absolutely, good; and that he alone is immortal in an absolute sense; that he alone is self-existent; and, that, consequently, every other being, however high or low, is absolutely dependent upon him for life; for being.⁵

From this fact Stevenson did not just say that Jesus Christ was not as immortal as the Father, but that in his “sphere” it was an obvious difference as well. Stephenson called Jesus Christ the “first begotten” or, using the borrowed biblical term, he called Him “The first born of every creature.” He stated that the “creature signifies creation; hence to be the first born of every creature, (creation) he must be a created being and as such, his life and immortality must depend upon the Father's will, just as much as angels, or redeemed men” and he emphasized that the “Divine nature” of the Son was not “the same” as that of the Father.⁶ The difference between “sphere” and “a created being” by the Father therefore made Jesus into a lower, but yet still a divine being.

More than a decade later, Uriah Smith wrote *Thoughts on Revelation* (1865).⁷ He recognized the divinity of Christ when he stated that Jesus Christ “is seated with his Father upon the throne of universal dominion, . . . and ranks equally with him in the overruling and disposition of the nations and affairs of earth.” Indeed, he writes that Christ is the “Lord” and “Son of God.” However, Smith denied that Jesus Christ was God and equal from eternity with the Father. He claimed that “the complete eternity, past and future, can be applicable only to God, the Father. This language, we believe, is never applied to Christ.”⁸ Regarding a phrase applied to Jesus Christ in Rev 3:14, he wrote that Christ is “not the beginner, but the beginning, of the creation, the first created being, dating his existence far back before any other created being or thing, next to the self-existent and eternal God.” Regarding the title “Alpha and Omega,” as applied to Jesus Christ, he explained that “the expression must be taken in a more limited sense than when

Doctrine of the Trinity in the Early Church and Seventh-day Adventist Church,” (MA Thesis Equivalency, AIIAS, Silang-Cavite, Philippines, 2015).

⁴ J. M. Stephenson, “The Atonement,” *Review and Herald* [RH], November 14, 1854, 105.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ This book was written in 1865, but it was not published until 1867. See [Editor], “Now Ready,” *RH*, May 14, 1867, 276; [Editor], “Our Book List,” *RH*, June 18, 1867, 15.

⁸ Uriah Smith, *Thoughts, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Revelation* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam press of the Seventh-day Adventist, 1865), 16, 26, 54, 14.

applied to the Father.”⁹ Uriah Smith believed that Jesus Christ was a Lord who was a created being, while still yet being divine, though being made by the Father.

Since this group denied Jesus Christ as God, they believed that He was only a created being who had a lower divine nature with a different “sphere” and substance than that of the Father. They refused to clearly say that Jesus Christ was truly part of the Godhead. They believed that only the Father was truly God, and Jesus Christ was the Lord and Son of God. This group refused to see Jesus Christ as fully God. They similarly also denied that the Holy Spirit was fully a personal part of the Godhead or Trinity.¹⁰ Uriah Smith identified Holy Spirit as “it” or as a “power,” and not as a person.¹¹

Jesus Christ as a Lord, but Not a God

A second major group within early Seventh-day Adventism included adherents who believed that Jesus Christ was a divine being, but that he was begotten and therefore not created by God. In a similar way to the first group, they believed that the word “God” was a term used only for the Father. The term “Lord” was reserved for Christ. They also understood the term “Lord God” as exclusively reserved for the Father, even though one individual from this group believed that Jesus Christ was in fact “equal with God.” Nevertheless, he still called him “Lord” but not God. Individuals from this group believed that the substance or nature of Jesus was different from that of the Father.

An example of one early Seventh-day Adventist pioneer who held this position was Joseph Bates. In 1846 he referred to Jesus as “the first born of every creature” who was “equal with God” (Phil 2: 5, 6) as well as the term “image of God” (Gen 1:27), advocating what was essentially a Unitarian understanding.¹² In response to the accusation that he was Unitarian, he replied “so then was Paul, or I have not quoted him right.”¹³ He rejected the Trinity because he understood that the “Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, was also the Almighty God, the Father, one and the same being.”¹⁴ He believed that “God and his Son to be two persons in heaven.” He stated: “I think here is sufficient proof from the Scriptures to justify the true believer to be still looking for a personal Saviour, and that God the Father is a person, and looks like Jesus and we like

⁹ Ibid., 323.

¹⁰ As for the second generation of Seventh-day Adventists, they preferred to use the term “Godhead” instead of “Trinity,” since the latter “still remained essentially a no-no in church usage---probably because it was a nonbiblical word and was associated with the creeds.” Gilbert M. Valentine, *W.W. Prescott: Forgotten Giant of Adventism’s Second Generation*, (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2005), 278. See also LeRoy Edwin Froom, *Movement of Destiny* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1971), 273.

¹¹ Smith, *Thoughts, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Revelation*, 14, 325.

¹² Unitarian was wide spreading in New England especially in the Christian Connection since early 19th century and the growing supporters were at Harvard. They believe that “Christ was God’s special son, ‘divine’ in a relative sense yet not equal with the Father.” Thomas H. Olbricht, “Unitarians,” *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, ed. Douglas A. Foster et al (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 749; see also D. A. Currie, “Unitarianism,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 1231-1232.

¹³ Joseph Bates, *The Opening Heavens: Or A Connected View of the Testimony of the Prophets and Apostles, Concerning the Opening Heavens, Compared with Astronomical Observations, and of the Present and Future Location of the New Jerusalem, the Paradise of God* (New Bedford, MA: Benjamin Lindsey, 1846), 18.

¹⁴ Joseph Bates, *The Autobiography of Elder Joseph Bates* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1970), 205.

him.”¹⁵ He denied the Trinity, in part, due to his misunderstanding about what was the orthodox view on the Trinity, but it was also due to his Unitarian understanding which placed Jesus as a lower divine entity from the Father.

James White, another co-founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, held a similar position with that of Joseph Bates. On January 8, 1845, he wrote an article that used the title “Lord God” four times, exclusively referring to the Father and “Lord” in reference to Jesus Christ. He refuted the idea that “Jesus is the eternal God” because “he is the Son of the eternal God.”¹⁶ He thought that only God is eternal. He had difficulty with the concept of the Trinity since he assumed that the Trinity, he believed, did not distinguish between the persons of the Father and the Son except by spiritualizing them. He stated that “here we might mention the Trinity, which does away with the personality of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ.”¹⁷ He claimed that the “trinity” was a made-up (fictional) doctrine from Roman Catholicism that the Protestant Reformers unfortunately retained as an erroneous belief.¹⁸ He called Jesus the “divine Lord”¹⁹ who was not the same as God.

J. N. Andrews was another pioneer who fits within this group. He expressed the idea that Jesus Christ was inferior to God “for he had God for his Father, and did, at some point in the eternity of the past, have beginning of days.” He contrasted this with “God the Father, who is without father, or mother, or descent, or beginning of days, or end of life.”²⁰ Andrews placed Jesus as inferior to God because he contended that only the Father was eternal in the absolute sense, and was neither fully with the Son. Subsequently, a few years later he suggested that the source of immortality for God was based upon 1 Tim 6:16, which states that “this text is evidently designed to teach that the self-existent God is the only being who, of himself, possesses this wonderful nature. Others may possess it as derived from him, but he alone is the fountain of immortality.” It means that Jesus Christ derived immortality from him, even though “our Lord Jesus Christ is the source of this life to us.”²¹ Andrews believed that the nature of God and the Lord Jesus was different since God is eternal, self-existent, and contained the source of immortality whereby Jesus Christ did “have beginning of days,” was not self-existent and his immortality was derived from the Father. That is why Andrews argued that the Father and the Son were different in “nature.”

Another significant individual was Uriah Smith whose understanding about the divinity of Christ developed over time. Initially, in 1872, he published *Fundamental Principles* which omitted the phrase “created being” in reference to Jesus Christ. He simply mentioned the “Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Eternal Father, the one by whom God created all things, and by whom they do consist.”²² The two main Seventh-day Adventist periodicals, *The Review and Herald* and *Signs of the Times*, published this statement in 1874. In these *Fundamental Principles*, allegedly reflected “so far as we

¹⁵ Bates, *Opening Heavens*, 18, 19.

¹⁶ J[ames] W[hite], “Letter from Bro. White,” *The Day-Star*, January 24, 1846, 25.

¹⁷ J[ames] W[hite], “Preach the Word,” *RH*, December 11, 1855, 85.

¹⁸ J[ames] W[hite], “The Word,” *RH*, February 7, 1856, 149.

¹⁹ J[ames] W[hite], “The Faith of Jesus,” *RH*, August 5, 1852, 52.

²⁰ J[ohn] N. Andrews, “Melchisedec,” *RH*, September 7, 1869, 84.

²¹ J[ohn] N. A[ndrews], “Immortality through Christ,” *RH*, January 27, 1874, 52.

²² Uriah Smith, *A Declaration of the Fundamental Principles Taught and Practiced by the Seventh-day Adventist* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1872).

know, entire unanimity throughout the body.”²³ But it was not “a system of faith, but is a brief statement of what is, and has been, with great unanimity, held by them [Seventh-day Adventists].”²⁴ Thus, the understanding of Jesus as Lord and the term “God” and “eternal” merely referred to the Father as the dominant understanding held by early Seventh-day Adventists during this formative period. In 1881, Smith revised his phraseology about Jesus Christ in Rev 3:14 when he replaced the term “created” with “begotten.”²⁵ Uriah Smith later refined his understanding on the divinity of Christ, which is further discussed later on in this paper.

Another influential, early Seventh-day Adventist minister who held this viewpoint was Roswell F. Cottrell. He noted “that the term trinity means the union of three persons, not offices, in one God” and concluded “that one person is three persons, and that three persons are only one person, is the doctrine which we claim is contrary to reason and common sense.” He did not believe that Jesus was “merely man.” Neither did he hold the view that the Son was the same person as the Father. He assumed that the Father and Son were “in perfect harmony, of one mind and purpose, one in design and one in action; they were one in creating the world, and one in redeeming it.” However, he still believed that the Son was inferior to the Father when he referenced to what Jesus said-- that “My Father is greater than I.” He claimed that “you will not make him contradict himself.” He called Jesus “Lord” or the “divine Son of God” while retaining the title “God” as strictly referring to the Father.²⁶

In 1883 the Seventh-day Adventist Church launched its first *Year Book*. The statements of faith of the church emerged in the *1889 Year Book* under the title “Fundamental Principles of the Seventh-day Adventists.” These convictions reflect those of Uriah Smith who referred to the Father by stating that “there is one God, a personal, spiritual being, the creator of all things, omnipotent, omniscient, and eternal.” In the second article it states “there is one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Eternal Father, the one by whom he created all things.”²⁷ While this statement may be “interpreted favorably by either Semi-Arian or Trinitarians,”²⁸ nevertheless it reflects the view of Uriah Smith that the word “Lord” should only be used for Jesus Christ, and the words “God” and “eternal” should refer only to the Father.

This group maintained that Jesus was a lower divine being and therefore different in nature when compared with the Father. They believed that He did not deserve the title “God.” This caused them to deny Jesus Christ as part of the Godhead, as well as the Holy Spirit, since they recognized that such a title was only befitting as applied to the Father.

²³ U[riah] S[mith], “A Brief Sketch of their Origin, Progress, and Principles,” *RH*, November 24, 1874, 171.

²⁴ [Editor], “Fundamental Principles,” *Signs of the Times*, June 4, 1874, 3. Words in bracket are added.

²⁵ Uriah Smith, *Thoughts, Critical and practical, on the Book of Revelation* (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist, 1881), 74.

²⁶ R. F. Cottrell, “The Trinity,” *RH*, July 6, 1869, 10-11.

²⁷ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-Day Adventist Year Book of Statistics for 1889: Comprising the Classified Business Proceedings of the General Conference, the International Tract Society, the International Sabbath-school Association, the American Health and Temperance Association, Denominational Publishing Houses, Colleges, Etc., Supplemented with a Department of General Information, Interspersed with Practical Comments on the Proposed Religious Amendment to the Constitution of the United States* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1889), 147.

²⁸ Whidden, Moon, Reeve, *The Trinity*, 203.

Generally, they described the Holy Spirit as an energy or medium, and used the words “its” or “itself,” as was indicated in the *Year Book*.²⁹

Jesus Christ as a Fully Subordinate God

A third group believes that Jesus Christ is God, but He is, in a sense, inferior to the Father. His subordination is from everlasting—even before the incarnation. As a result, the power that He had before his first coming was derived from the Father, and prevails forever. Supporters of this view see the word “begotten” as meaning fully subordinate.

D. W. Hull expressed this belief in 1859 by stating that Jesus Christ is a fully subordinate God, with a distinct person, but who is not included in the Godhead. He comments on John 1:14: “this is undoubtedly the same Word which was in the beginning with God, and which was God.” He then asked: “why was the Word called God?” In reference to John 1:3, he says that “as Christ has always been known to cooperate with the Father, there is no doubt that through his agency the worlds were formed.” Hull believed that Christ is God, but this function is as an agent of the Father, since “his power is only delegated.” He commented (referencing John 10:34) that “Christ does not in the above passage deny that he is God; and we have found heretofore that he has been called God.” However, Hull assumed there is a different quality between the two. He wrote that “there is here a clear distinction made between the Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father. The distinguishing qualities are, that whilst one is called the Son, the other is known as God the Father.”³⁰ Hull’s objection to the Trinitarian understanding was based upon the idea that Jesus and the Father are one person, so that, if Jesus died on the cross it meant that God “could not have raised Jesus from the dead.”³¹ He believed the Son and the Father are distinct persons. Regarding the substance, he thought that the Son was an inferior “God” to the Father. Hull confirmed this view of subordination by referencing Matt. 28:18: “The very fact that he informs his disciples that all power had been given him, implies that hitherto (although he had great power) he had not possessed all power.”³² Altogether, Hull believed that Jesus did not fully share in the Godhead, but instead, only the Father was counted as fully divine in the Trinity.³³

James White, toward the end of his life, developed a much more nuanced idea about the divinity of Christ. In 1876 he called Jesus Christ the “divine Son.” He also stated: “Adventists hold the divinity of Christ so nearly with the trinitarian, that we apprehend no trial here.”³⁴ He further explained (1877) that Jesus Christ before his incarnation was “in the form of God” and “equal with God. . . . The reason why it is not robbery for the Son to be equal with the Father is the fact that he is equal.”³⁵ However, as far as equality is concerned, it seems that this would only have limited things since he stated that “The Son . . . was equal with the Father in creation, in the institution of law,

²⁹ General Conference, *1889 Year Book*, 150.

³⁰ D. W. Hull, “Bible Doctrine of the Divinity of Christ,” *RH*, November 10, 1859, 193-194.

³¹ D. W. Hull, “Bible Doctrine of the Divinity of Christ,” *RH*, November 17 1859, 201

³² Hull, *RH*, November 10 1859, 195. Words in parentheses are original.

³³ Hull, *RH*, November 17, 1859, 201-201; idem, *RH*, November 10, 1859, 194.

³⁴ J[ames] W[hite], “The Two Bodies,” *RH*, October 12, 1876, 116.

³⁵ J[ames] W[hite], “Christ Equal with God,” *RH*, November 29, 1877, 172.

and in the government of created intelligences.”³⁶ His view about the divinity of Christ was somewhat neglected as part of the Trinity, an idea he explained as being “bad enough.”³⁷ He maintained that the subordination of the Son as the Word who was “eternal” only referred to the Father.³⁸ One scholar observes that James White “contended with the Trinitarians who gave Christ the Father’s divinity.”³⁹

Uriah Smith, similar to James White, developed in his understanding about the divinity of Christ. He referenced Phil. 2:5-8 when he stated that Jesus Christ was “the only being save God” that was “equal with the Father, and sharing equally in the glory.” He referred to him as “deity.” However, the pre-existence of Jesus Christ, based upon John 1:14 and John 8:42, was the “begotten” of the Son who was “by some divine impulse or process, not creation, known only to Omniscience, and possible only to Omnipotence, the Son of God appeared.” He affirmed the superiority of the Father over the Son by stating that “God alone is without beginning. At the earliest epoch when a beginning could be, -- a period so remote that to finite minds it is essentially eternity, -- appeared the Word.” The subordination of Jesus Christ was not just in His existence, but also in terms of the power of creation. He stated: “the Father” was “the antecedent cause, the Son” was “the acting agent through whom all has been wrought.”⁴⁰ Smith believed, like D. W. Hull, that the created Jesus Christ was an agent and source of power derived from the Father. He had no power of his own. Thus, he affirmed the full subordination of Jesus Christ to the Father.

D. M. Canright stridently battled against a kind of Trinitarian concept that God is not a person, but only a spirit.⁴¹ Nevertheless, his concept about God was based upon the idea that only the Father was true God and the Son was derived from him. He used John 1:1 to state that “Christ is plainly called God. Many argue from this that he is the very and eternal God, the Father. But this is not a necessary conclusion, especially since other scriptures plainly deny the idea.” He also referenced Heb. 1: 8, 9, in which the Father called the Son God. He stated: “we see that the Father has given the name of God to his Son.” Canright called Jesus Christ to be God, but the name was derived from the Father, since “he was the first being that was ever born into the universe.” He was “begotten of the Father’s own substance” and therefore “the Son is subordinate to the Father.” He argued that the Son was inferior to the Father, since “Christ disclaims all power or authority in and of himself and says that he gets it all from his Father; that the Son is entirely dependent upon the Father.”⁴² Canright wrote that it was not just in power and name that Jesus Christ owed His deity to the Father, but also “his existence and his life

³⁶ J[ames] W[hite], “The Son represents the Father,” *RH*, July 15, 1880, 56.

³⁷ W[hite], *RH*, November 29, 1877, 172.

³⁸ J[ames] W[hite], “The Time of the End,” *RH*, July 15, 1880, 56.

³⁹ Varmer, “Analysis of the Seventh-day Adventist Pioneer Anti-Trinitarian Position,” 16.

⁴⁰ Uriah Smith, *Looking unto Jesus: Christ in Type and Antitype* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1898), 11, 13, 10, 13. Uriah Smith also mentioned that Jesus Christ was an agent in the creation in his 1899 publication entitled, *The Prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1944), 391.

⁴¹ D. M. Canright, “The Personality of God,” *RH*, August 29, 1878, 73-74; September 5, 1878, 81-82; September 12, 1878, 89-90; September 19, 1878, 97-98.

⁴² D. M. Canright, “Jesus Christ the Son of God,” *RH*, June 18, 1867, 2, 1, 2. Canright claimed that for Adventists the name “very and eternal God” only referred to the Father exclusively. Idem, “Answer to ‘Inquirer,’” *RH*, Nov 1, 1877, 144.

from the Father.”⁴³ He concluded: “Christ, being the Son of God, has inherited the name, the nature, and the glory of God his Father. Hence he is by inheritance placed far above all other things.”⁴⁴ In this concept Jesus does not have power, but all things are derived from the Father and subordinate to Him. This subordination is from everlasting because of his being “entirely dependent upon the Father.” Therefore, he called the Father the “true and living God. He is eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent.”⁴⁵ He was “greater than the Son, but Christ is truly his Son; hence a divine Being.”⁴⁶ Canright avoided calling Jesus God in the same sense as the Father, since he was fully subordinate to the Father. This prevented the Son from being a part of the Trinity.

J. H. Waggoner recognized the “pre-existent divinity” of Jesus Christ. This was based upon John 1:1. “[T]he Word *was* God, and also the Word *was with* God.” He distinguished between the person of the Son and the Father: “the word *as* God, was not *the* God whom he was *with*.” He suggested that Jesus Christ was an inferior God to the Father. He stated “there is but ‘one God,’ the term must be used in reference to the Word in a subordinate sense.” The true God was the Father. The Son received the title, as Waggoner explained it, since “the title of God is applied to the Son, and *his* God anointed him. This is the highest title he can bear, and it is evidently used here in a sense subordinate to its application to his Father.”⁴⁷ Waggoner believed that even though technically Jesus could be referred to as God, such a title was subordinate to the Father.

Altogether, a survey of the early pioneers, indicates that many viewed the Son as an inferior God to the Father and thus to be effectively fully subordinate. They hesitated to use the term “God” in reference to the Son, even though He was God. The Father was truly God, Jesus was a subordinate God, or at most Lord. He was subordinate, both in terms of origin and power. The Son was an “agent” in the work of creation. They did not accept Jesus Christ as a part of the Godhead, and thus regarded His position as subordinate to the Father. This refutation included Jesus as part of the Godhead and significantly impacted their view of the Holy Spirit whom they assumed to be an “it,”⁴⁸ “medium,”⁴⁹ “mighty energy,”⁵⁰ or “power.”⁵¹ Thus quite evidently for these thinkers, Jesus was not fully a part of the Godhead.

Jesus Christ as A Partially Subordinate God

⁴³ Canright, *RH*, August 29, 1878, 73.

⁴⁴ Canright, *RH*, June 18, 1867, 2.

⁴⁵ Canright, *RH*, August 29, 1878, 73.

⁴⁶ Canright, *RH*, Nov 1, 1877, 144.

⁴⁷ J. H. Waggoner, *The Atonement: An Examination of a Remedial System in the Light of Nature and Revelation* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1872), 87-88. Italics are in the original.

⁴⁸ James White, *Life Incidents, in Connection with the Great Advent Movement, as Illustrated by the Three Angels of Revelation xiv* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1868), 290.

⁴⁹ Smith, *Looking unto Jesus*, 10.

⁵⁰ Uriah Smith, *Synopsis of the Present Truth: A Brief Exposition of the Views of S. D. Adventists* (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1884), 247.

⁵¹ Regarding the personality of Holy Spirit, Waggoner was not certain: he said that the “prevailing ideas of *person* are very diverse, often crude, and the word is differently understood.” However, he defined the Holy Spirit as follows: Tthe “Spirit of God is that awful and mysterious power which proceeds from the throne of universe, and which is the efficient actor in the work of creation and of redemption.” J. H. Waggoner, *The Spirit of God: Its Offices and Manifestations, to the end of the Christian Age* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1877), 8, 9.

Another group believed that Jesus Christ was God in the sense that He had the same attributes as the Father. They deliberately described the Son as being God. However, their major concern with this idea was the pre-existence of the Son whom they saw as not co-eternal with the Father. Over time, at a distant point in the past was it that Jesus Christ emerged from the Father.

Ellet J. Waggoner, in his earliest descriptions of the divinity of Christ (1884), described the Father as One who “gave His only begotten Son,— the one by whom all things were made, whom angels worship with the reference equal to that which they yield to God,—that man might have eternal life.”⁵² He recognized the Son as creator and worthy of the same worship given to the Father. Waggoner wrote more extensively about the divinity of Christ (1890) in comments on Mark 10:17-18 that “Christ cannot deny Himself, . . . He is and was absolutely good, the perfection of goodness. And since there is none good but God, and Christ is good, it follows that Christ is God.” Waggoner frequently referred to Christ as God in his later writings. He noted in connection with John 10:30 that “truly was Christ God, even when here among men, that when asked to exhibit the Father He could say, Behold Me.” The Son, according to Waggoner (referencing Col 2:9): “possesses by nature all the attributes of Divinity.” He also has “the very substance and nature of God, and possesses by birth all the attributes of God.” Thus “He has ‘life in Himself;’ He possesses immortality in His own right, and can confer immortality upon others.” In this sense, his life was not dependent on the Father. For this reason, Waggoner said that the Son “having life in Himself, should be properly called Jehovah, ‘the self-existent One.’” This particular description, “self-existent,” as a way to refer to the Son is notable because “He has by nature all the attributes of Deity.” Waggoner is one of the earliest Seventh-day Adventists who wrote that Jesus Christ was in fact self-existent. Since he believed that the Son and the Father have the same nature, their attributes and substance meant that Jesus Christ was not just to be seen “as a part of the Godhead” but also was “filled with all the fullness of the Godhead.” He regarded the term “begotten” to mean that “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.”⁵³ In reality this meant that he was more of a semi-Arian, although his writings helped to set a new Christological direction in Adventist theology.

During the 1888 General Conference Session E. J. Waggoner and G. I Butler disagreed on the topic of righteousness by faith. Despite their differences, they shared a similar view about the divinity of Christ. Butler described Jesus Christ as the “I AM THAT I AM” who appeared in the Old Testament “to point out the *eternity* and *self-existence* of God.” Butler argued that this title was not solely about the Father. He stated the following: “does not the name of the Father belong also to the only begotten Son of the Father, in whom all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily?” Butler understood that the Son is eternal and self-existent, and took part in the Godhead. He emphasized that the Son is God (John 8:56-59), based upon the pre-existence of Jesus; and thus, once “they fully realized this expression meant he was God, not only existing before Abraham

⁵² E. J. Waggoner, “Eternal Life,” *Sign of the Times*, August 28, 1884, 522.

⁵³ E[ll]et J[oseph] Waggoner, *Christ and His Righteousness* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 1972), 14, 16, 22, 23, 12, 15, 22, 21-22.

did, but a title of the infinite God, uncreated, the God of their fathers. And they were evidently right.” Thus, Butler convincingly argued that Jesus Christ was “a being called the God of Israel.”⁵⁴ But it must be made clear that ultimately Butler held to a viewpoint that was similar to that of Waggoner: he would go to note that the word “eternity” did not mean all eternity. He distinguished the title of the Father as ‘the King eternal, immortal, *invisible*, the only wise God,’ versus the Son “Emmanuel, *God with us*, the Interpreter, the Revealer, the divine Word.”⁵⁵ He thus held that Jesus Christ was the “begotten” Son of the Father, which simply meant that he was not as old as the Father.

A.T. Jones, another leading protagonist at the 1888 General Conference Session, believed that Jesus Christ was God. He called the Son the “divine One” and explicitly mentioned Him as God. On the incarnation of the Son of God, Jones said that “he not only humbled himself as God” but also “He emptied himself as God, and became man.”⁵⁶ With regard to the nature of the Son and his equality to the Father, Jones stated: “He was one of God, equal with God; and his nature is the nature of God.” For Jones, since the Father abided in Jesus Christ, the Son was described as follows: “‘All the fullness of the Godhead Bodily’ is reflected in him.”⁵⁷ For this reason, Jones believed that Jesus could partake of the Godhead. He formulated (in 1899) that “God is *one*. Jesus Christ is *one*. The Holy Spirit is *one*. And these *three* are *one*: there is no dissent nor division among them.”⁵⁸ At first glance this statement appears to support a Trinitarian viewpoint; however, he saw that there was a difference in the span of eternity between the Father and the Son. He wrote that the Son is “eternal,”⁵⁹ even though he believed there was a time when He proceeded out from the Father. This argument (based on Proverbs 8:30) stated: “He alone could reflect the Father in his fullness, because his goings forth have been from the days of eternity.” With regard to the work of salvation for humanity he wrote: “only he whose goings forth have been from the days of eternity could do it.”⁶⁰ The term “goings forth” expressed a moving out from the Father and it happened in “the days of eternity.” Jones stated that “God is one” and therefore the three persons in the Godhead were in reality an advanced step to the full acceptance of the Trinity even though his understanding of eternity was in reality closer to that of Waggoner and Butler.⁶¹

⁵⁴ G. I. B[utler], “Christ the God of Israel,” *RH*, September 12, 1893, 585, 586. Italics are in the original document.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 585; see also *idem*, “Christ the God of Israel,” *RH*, September 12, 1893, 599. Italics are also in the original document.

⁵⁶ A. T. Jones, “The Third Angels’s Message—no. 17,” *General Conference Bulletin*, February 25, 1895, 330, 332. This sermon used the quotations of Ellen G. White freely that were taken from *Review and Herald*, July 5, 1887.

⁵⁷ A. T. Jones, “The Third Angels’s Message—no. 20,” *General Conference Bulletin*, February 27, 1895, 378.

⁵⁸ [A. T. Jones], [editorial], *RH*, January 10, 1899, 24. Italics are in the original document.

⁵⁹ Jones, *General Conference Bulletin*, February 25, 1895, 332.

⁶⁰ Jones, *General Conference Bulletin*, February 27, 1895, 378.

⁶¹ Jones wrote that the sacrifice of Jesus for the salvation of sinners is for “all eternity.” Nevertheless, his understanding of the expression “all eternity” was not meant in its full sense. He stated “for how long a time was it? That’s the question. And the answer is that it was for all eternity. The Father gave up his Son to us, and Christ gave up himself to us, for all eternity. Never again will he be in all respects as he was before.” The phrase “never again” shows that there was a time that he ever had “all respects” before he

W. W. Prescott, another influential leader and scholar, expressed the idea that Jesus Christ was God.⁶² He stated that “He has life originally in Himself; His essence is life.”⁶³ At the 1919 Bible Conference he combined the eternity of Jesus Christ and his derivation from the Father.⁶⁴ He believed that Jesus Christ was not just eternal, but co-eternal with the Father. He said “I think the expression ‘I am’ is the equivalent of eternity. I think these expressions, while they do not use the term co-eternal, are equivalent in their meaning.” However, in an inferior sense, the relationship of the Son to the Father was the same since the “Son is subordinate to the Father, but that subordination is not in the question of attributes or of His existence. It is simply in the fact of the derived existence.” He plainly stated “the Son is co-eternal with the Father.” Nevertheless, he stated that Jesus Christ was “One with the Father, one in authority, in power, in love, in mercy, and all the attributes -- equal with him and yet second in nature.” He avoided the term “inferior,” but instead, “second in nature” meant “second in rank.”⁶⁵ The concept that Christ was born in eternity past was conceived by Prescott as early as 1896 when he wrote that “Christ was twice born,—once in eternity, the only begotten of the Father, and again here in the flesh, thus uniting the divine with the human in that second birth.”⁶⁶ He still retained a partial subordination of Christ for the next two decades when he stated “the Son existing with the Father from eternity, and possessing to the full the Father’s infinite powers, but these received from the Father, existing because the Father wills him so to exist, eternal and infinite and derived.” He also wrote that “as the Father possesses these divine attributes from himself alone, whereas the Son possesses them as derived from the Father, in this real sense and in this sense only, the Father is greater than the Son.”⁶⁷ Altogether, the efforts by Prescott, to combine the eternal Son as being a part of his derivation from the Father, was not fully convincing. Still, he made a significant contribution by suggesting that Christ was co-eternal with the Father, even though this meant in a subordinate sense.

O. A. Johnson, an educator like Prescott, believed that Jesus Christ had all the nature of God, to the point that He was worthy to be called God. He wrote that “since Christ is begotten of the Father, he must therefore be of the same substance as the Father; hence he must have the same divine attributes that God has, and therefore he is God.” He continued by saying that the Son deserves to have the title, that is, since “the Father calls his Son ‘God,’ and therefore he must be God.” However, the word “begotten” as the Son

sacrificed himself. Thus for Jones the words “all eternity” are not full in past time but fully for the present and future. *Ibid.*, 382.

⁶² W. W. Prescott, “Gospel by John Chapter 1 to 6:14,” *International Sabbath School Quarterly*, third quarter (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 1896), 6.

⁶³ W. W. Prescott, “Gospel by John Chapter 10:1 to 14:31,” *International Sabbath School Quarterly*, first quarter (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 1896), 16.

⁶⁴ A more specific treatment of this issue could be read in the work of Merlin D. Burt, “Demise of Semi-Arianism and Anti-Trinitarianism,” 26-28.

⁶⁵ “Report of Bible Conference, Held in Takoma Park, D. C., July 1-19, 1919 (RBC),” July 2, 1919, 20, 27, 30.

⁶⁶ W. W. Prescott, “The Christ for Today,” *RH*, April 14, 1896, 232.

⁶⁷ W. W. Prescott, *Doctrine of Christ: A Series of Bible Studies for Use in Colleges and Seminaries* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1920), 20.

of God, made the Father the “greatest” among the Godhead and “greater than” the Son.⁶⁸ He did not just confirm the divinity of Christ, but also the Godhead or Trinity. He stated “there are three persons in the Godhead; viz., the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.” He believed that the Holy Spirit is a person and the “third name in the trinity” since he “proceeds from the Father.”⁶⁹ Johnson contributed to the development of Adventist beliefs when he explicitly stated that the Holy Spirit was a person and belonged to the “Godhead” or “Trinity.” However, he retained a partial subordination between the Son and the Holy Spirit, in which both came out of the Father.

The 1931 statement of faith was not an official statement of beliefs since it was not voted in General Conference session.⁷⁰ This statement of faith appeared for many years in the *Year Book* and the *Church Manual*. The statement on the Godhead simply stated “that the Godhead, or Trinity, consists of the Eternal Father, a personal, spiritual Being, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, infinite in wisdom and love; the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Eternal Father, . . . the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead.” This explicitly expressed that only the Father is “Eternal” and that Jesus Christ is merely the “Son of the Eternal Father.” The subsequent statement follows with the same phrase that referred only to the Father as eternal. It indicated “that Jesus Christ is very God, being of the same nature and essence as the Eternal Father.”⁷¹ It designated the words “very God” when it emphasized that the Son of God was of “the same nature and essence” with the Father, but he still did not answer the question about the eternity of the Son. Thus, the telling expression “left room for interpretation.”⁷² However, this statement of fundamental beliefs expressed the acceptance of the Holy Spirit as a person, including His part in the Trinity. He left “room” regarding the meaning of the full eternity of the Son, which was then effectively left for later individuals to explore in much greater depth.

The 1936 Sabbath School quarterly reflected some of this discussion about different interpretations of the Son’s eternity. T. M. French wrote that “we learn that the name God is used of the Father, of the Son, and of the Spirit—a kind of heavenly family name. These three constitute the Godhead.” The recognition of three persons in the Godhead was followed up with another explanation that Jesus Christ, as the “begotten” Son, was existing “in the days of eternity, and was very God Himself.” Does this mean that Christ belonged, in the full sense of term, to have existed within the full span of eternity? The author explained that “we cannot comprehend eternity—without beginning and without ending—yet it is clearly affirmed here that the life which Christ possesses is ‘from the days of eternity.’” Nevertheless, when French invoked the title “God” for Jesus Christ he tried to clarify its meaning: “A son is the natural heir, and when God made Christ His heir, He recognized His sonship. This is why the Son bore the same name as

⁶⁸ O. A. Johnson, *Bible Doctrines: Containing 150 lessons on Creation, Government of God, Rebellion in Heaven, Fall of Man, Redemption, Prophecies, Millennium, End of Sinners, and Satan, Paradise restored, etc., etc.* (Collage Place, WA: n. p., 1911), 27, 26, 27.

⁶⁹ O. A. Johnson, *Bible Doctrines: Containing 150 lessons on Creation, Government of God, Rebellion in Heaven, Fall of Man, Redemption, Prophecies, Millennium, End of Sinners, and Satan, Paradise restored, etc., etc.* 4th rev. ed. (Collage Place, WA: n. p., 1917), 34, 37.

⁷⁰ Gilbert Valentine, “The Stop-Start Journey on the Road to A Church Manual,” *Ministry*, June, 1999, 22.

⁷¹ *1931 Year Book of the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination*, prepared by H. E. Rogers (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1931), 377.

⁷² Burt, “Demise of Semi-Arianism and Anti-Trinitarianism,” 37.

His Father.” He argued that the title “God” was chosen because the Son inherited it from the Father (Heb. 1:4).⁷³ Thus while one assumed the words “very God” in the 1931 Fundamental beliefs referred to a Son who was the “equally self-existent and eternal” Son to the Father,⁷⁴ French understood this in a different way. He believed that the words “eternal” or “eternity” (that is, of the Father) could not be used in the same sense as when they referred to Jesus Christ.

After the 1931 fundamental beliefs were circulated, some Seventh-day Adventists struggled to define the term “eternal” in relation to Jesus Christ. This is especially obvious in reviewing the statements between 1932 and 1942 in the *Church Manual*.⁷⁵ The earliest edition of the *Church Manual* (1932) consisted of a formulation of beliefs with the purpose of providing a means for the “examination of candidates for baptism and church membership.” The list contained twenty-one inquiries for the baptismal candidates. The first question was about the Father God as a person, and continued with the second about “the Lord Jesus as the eternal Son of God, and as the Saviour and Redeemer of mankind.”⁷⁶ Together these statements implied that only the Father was “eternal” and the Son derived his divinity from him. However, a “summary of fundamental beliefs” in the 1942 *Church Manual* mentions a similar idea. It described the Father as “the true and living God, the first person of the Godhead” and regarded the Son “Jesus Christ” to be “the second person of the Godhead, and the eternal Son of God.”⁷⁷ A more progressive understanding of the Son appears in this 1942 *Church Manual* in which Jesus Christ is described as “eternal.” However, it does not define whether this means He had existed from all eternity, or some point in eternity past. It does specify that the Father is the “true and living God” who shows that the Son’s life is derived from Him. This expression, as used by some Adventists earlier, indicates that only the Father possessed original life.⁷⁸ The Son simply derived such life from Him.

A major problem within this group was the question of how to accept the fact that Jesus Christ and the Father were co-eternal. The word “begotten” Son of the Father was a stumbling block for those who held onto the idea that the Father and Son were equal from all eternity. However, this group generally accepted the personality of the Holy Spirit,⁷⁹ even though some used “it” or “he” interchangeably⁸⁰ and that He came out from the

⁷³ [T. M. French], “Bible Doctrines: Number One,” *Sabbath School Lesson Quarterly*, October 17-24, 1936, 10, 13, 12.

⁷⁴ Burt, “Demise of Semi-Arianism and Anti-Trinitarianism,” 36.

⁷⁵ In both Church Manuals the 1931 fundamental beliefs were included. These statements of faith were inclusive for many years in the *Church Manual*.

⁷⁶ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Church Manual* (Washington, DC: The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1932), 75.

⁷⁷ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Church Manual* (Washington, DC: The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1942), 81.

⁷⁸ For example, Canright, *RH*, August 29, 1878, 73; R. F. Cottrell, “Sealing of the Servants of God,” *RH*, April 29, 1875, 137; John G. Matteson, “Tylstrup, Denmark,” *RH*, March 28, 1878, 100; J. P. Henderson, “Worship God,” *RH*, June 19, 1883, 387.

⁷⁹ Waggoner, *Christ and His Righteousness*, 23, 67, 80, 84; Jones, *General Conference Bulletin*, February 25, 1895, 329; Idem, Jones, *General Conference Bulletin*, February 27, 1895, 379; [French], *Sabbath School Lesson*, 10; General Conference, *Church Manual* [1932], 76; Idem, *Church Manual* [1942], 81.

⁸⁰ Johnson, *Bible Doctrines* [1911], 28; Idem, *Bible Doctrines* [1917], 34; W. W. Prescott, *The Promise of the Holy Spirit* (Payson, AZ: Leaves-of-Autumn, 1989), 3, 8, 99, 96, 132, 133, 11, 82, 123, 124.

Father.⁸¹ Since they accepted His divine personality, they also accepted Him as the third person within the Godhead. This group accepted the Godhead or Trinity, three persons in one as God, but the Son and the Holy Spirit was subordinate to the Father within this framework of “eternal.”

Jesus Christ Fully God

Another group within Adventism has contended that Jesus Christ had the same divine substance and nature, and that it was underived and co-eternal with the Father. Jesus Christ was truly eternal in the fullest sense. He was self-existent. The Father was not “older” than him. There was no time in eternity past when the Father existed ahead of the Son.

Ellen G. White was a major force in guiding the Seventh-day Adventist Church toward this viewpoint. She had a Methodist background which believed that the persons of the Godhead had no “body or parts.”⁸² However, as early as 1850 she claimed that “I have often seen the lovely Jesus, that He is a *person*. I asked Him if His Father was a person and had a form like Himself. Said Jesus, ‘I am in the express *image* of My Father’s *person*.’”⁸³ She accepted that God did not have an impersonal form, but rather, she viewed Jesus Christ as a divine being. She stated (in 1869) that “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.”⁸⁴ She repeated this idea (1872) that He was a “divine Son of God” and that He “was in the form of God, and he thought it not robbery to be equal with God.”⁸⁵ While many contemporary Adventist writers hesitated to use the word “eternal” in describing the Son, during the 1870s, she penned that Jesus Christ was indeed “the eternal Son of God.”⁸⁶ Several years later she stated that Jesus Christ was “the eternal word” and therefore “God became man.”⁸⁷ With regard to the oneness of the Son with the Father, she claimed that He is “one with the eternal Father,—one in nature, in character, and in purpose.”⁸⁸ After the 1888 General Conference Session she emphasized that Jesus Christ was eternal, self-existent and equal with the Father in the fullest sense. She stated that “the Son of God shared the Father’s throne, and the glory of the eternal, self-existent One encircled both.” She said Jesus Christ was “Jehovah, the eternal, self-existent, uncreated One.”⁸⁹ She reiterated this idea (in 1897) that the Son was “infinite and omnipotent; eternal, self-existent.”⁹⁰ The following year she expanded the idea as to how the Son of God “announced Himself to

⁸¹ Johnson, *Bible Doctrines* [1911], 28; Idem, *Bible Doctrines* [1917], 37; [French], *Sabbath School Lesson*, 11.

⁸² Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1977), 3: 807.

⁸³ Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1906), 77. Italics are in the original document.

⁸⁴ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 2: 200.

⁸⁵ Ellen G. White, “The First Advent of Christ,” *RH*, December 17, 1872, 2.

⁸⁶ Ellen G. White, “An Appeal to the Ministers,” *RH*, August 8, 1878, 1.

⁸⁷ Ellen G. White, “Christ Man’s Example,” *RH*, July 5, 1887, 1.

⁸⁸ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan During the Christian Dispensation*, (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 1888), 493.

⁸⁹ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets, The Story of, or The Great Conflict Between Good and Evil as Illustrated in the Lives of Holy Men of Old* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 1890), 36, 305.

⁹⁰ Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1946), 615.

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.’” She was emphatic that “in Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived.”⁹¹ The substance of the Son was indeed “one” with the Father. She stated “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.”⁹² Even the term “eternity” used to describe about the Son was defined as “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.”⁹³ She reinforced the pre-existence of the Son as: “He was with God from all eternity.”⁹⁴ His “glory which He had with the Father from all eternity.”⁹⁵ The statement about “the days of eternity” was the stumbling block for many Adventist leaders at that time who refused to believe that the Son was co-eternal with the Father. “From the days of eternity the Lord Jesus Christ was one with the Father.”⁹⁶ Altogether White contributed by guiding and directing the acceptance of the concept of the divinity of Christ within Seventh-day Adventism.

Le Roy E. Froom expounded upon this concept of the Trinity within the Godhead. He stated (1931) that “our God is one God (Deut. 6:4); but there are three persons in the one Godhead.” He explained the Trinity is like “a triangle . . . it has three sides. So the Godhead, being one, is manifested as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” So that the attributes of God, according to Froom, such as “omnipotence (Luke 1:35), omnipresence (Ps. 139:7-10), and eternal life (Heb. 9:14)” refer to Holy Spirit as well as to the Father and the Son.⁹⁷ Froom clarifies the persons within the Godhead or Trinity because each possessed the same level in nature, eternity, and attributes. Later (1971) Froom clarified that the term “begotten Son of God” was “the concept that Christ was ‘begotten,’ or ‘born,’ of the Father at some time back in eternity is altogether alien to Scripture.” He explained that “the term or title ‘Son of God’ denotes a special relation between God and Jesus Christ. But the idea of filiation is excluded.” Even the pre-existence of “Christ is and always has been, very God of very God, one with the Father, of the same substance or essence, the eternal Second Person of the eternal Godhead – God in the highest and fullest sense, ‘all the fullness of the Godhead.’” Finally, he concluded that “Christ was and is eternally divine – consubstantial and coeternal with the Father, and therefore self-existent and coexistent.”⁹⁸ Froom understood the term “very God” as used in the 1931 Fundamental Belief as indicating that the Son was co-eternal and co-existent with the Father.

Another prominent scholar, after the death of Ellen White, was Milian L. Andreassen. He believed that the divinity of Christ indicated that He was co-eternal with

⁹¹ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages: The Conflict of the Ages Illustrated in the Life of Christ* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1898), 470, 530.

⁹² Ellen G. White, “The True Sheep Respond to the Voice of the Shepherd,” *Sign of the Times*, November 27, 1893, 54.

⁹³ Ellen G. White, “Resistance to Light no. 3,” *Signs of the Times*, August 29, 1900, 3.

⁹⁴ Ellen G. White, “The Word Made Flesh,” *RH*, April 5, 1906, 8.

⁹⁵ Ellen White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain view, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 39.

⁹⁶ White, *Desire of Ages*, 19.

⁹⁷ Le Roy Edwin Froom, *The Coming of the Comforter* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1931), 50, 49.

⁹⁸ Froom, *Movement of Destiny*, 311-312.

the Father. He commented on Jesus Christ in Heb. 1:3 that the Word “being” in this verse “is an expression of eternal, timeless existence and has the same sense as ‘was’ in John 1:1.” He continued: the Son “did not come into existence in the beginning. In the beginning He *was*. He did not *become* the brightness of the Father's glory. He always was. This constitutes the essential and eternal ground of His personality.” Andreasen connected the nature of the Father and the Son so that “the Father, so is the Son—one in substance, one in character, one in mind and purpose.”⁹⁹ He wrote (1948) about the Son in Heb. 1:2 stating that “the Son of God, Christ is Himself God.” In relation to Jesus Christ toward the Trinity, he wrote that “Christ is Creator indicates a division of activity among the members of the Godhead.” With regard to Jesus Christ’s pre-existence, he believed “in His preincarnate state” that “Christ was equal with God. He was with God and was God.” Thus, he affirmed the eternity of Jesus Christ that “Christ is the eternal Son of God.”¹⁰⁰ Since he believed in the “timeless existence” of the Son, He was always together with the Father. Froom and Andreasen represent a significant shift in accepting the full and complete eternal existence of Jesus Christ.

Even what is arguably the most controversial book in Adventist history, *Questions on Doctrine*, a book that Andreasen strongly took exception to, advocated the full and complete divinity of Jesus Christ. It appears that the full and complete divinity of Christ was largely accepted by the 1950s, even if there were occasional pockets of resistance. This work “set forth our basic beliefs in terminology currently used in theological circles.” The publication was faithful to “the framework of the official statement of Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists which appears in our *Church Manual*,” including the 1931 Fundamental Beliefs, which was quoted in their entirety. The author described the Trinity as the “Father, Son and Holy Spirit—who are united not only in the Godhead but in the provisions of redemption.” With regard to the pre-existence of Jesus Christ, it simply stated “that Christ is one with the Eternal Father—one in nature, equal in power and authority, God in the highest sense, eternal and self-existent, with life original, unborrowed, underived.” Even the term “eternity,” used with regard to the Son and His nature, the writers explained “that Christ existed from all eternity, distinct from, but united with, the Father, possessing the same glory, and all the divine attributes.”¹⁰¹ Thus this work represents the first publication from the General Conference which explained the position of the church about the full divinity of Jesus Christ and the Trinity.

Another notable book, that was prepared by the General Conference department of education in 1959, written by T. H. Jemison, also confirmed the co-eternal status of the Son with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Jemison described the Godhead as “referring to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit in their unity.” The term Godhead or Trinity “is used as the equivalent of ‘the Deity’ in the sense of including the quality, condition, and dignity of being God.” With regard to the Son, he understood that “He is God in the full and unqualified meaning of that expression. He is God in nature, in power, in authority.” He also mentioned the attributes of Jesus Christ, who “in addition to

⁹⁹ M. L. Andreasen, “Christ, the Express Image of God,” *RH*, October 17, 1946, 8-9. Italics are in original document.

¹⁰⁰ M. L. Andreasen, *The Book of Hebrews* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1948), 46, 47, 63, 65.

¹⁰¹ Representative Group of Seventh-day Adventist leaders, Bible Teachers, and Editors, *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine: An Explanation of Certain Major Aspects of Seventh-day Adventist Belief* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1957), 8, 11-18, 36.

being eternal, He is said to possess the characteristics we call omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, and immutability.” The pre-existence of the Son, he believed, indicated that He was co-eternal with the Father.¹⁰²

Among the leading theologians of the Seventh-day Adventist Church during the 1970s and 1980s was Raoul Dederen. He expounded the concept of the Trinity as the equality of the persons in Godhead. In 1970 he stated that the Godhead consists of “Father, Son and Holy Spirit” and “that there is but one God.” Why are the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit each described as persons? Dederen argued as follows: “because they are described as doing that which only intelligent agents or persons can do.” He continued that “the three divine persons” are “at the same time distinct and yet one.” He not only described Jesus Christ as “God,” but “fully God.” He discussed the same attributes and nature of the persons within the Godhead, but each had a unique purpose for labor. He stated that “the triune God has really only one work to accomplish, just as he himself is one true God. That is his eternally all-embracing, life-creating and life-saving work. In this one work all three persons are actively engaged, drawing us away from sin, the devil and destruction.” He believed that the Father and the Son are co-eternal, and that this oneness included the Holy Spirit. As for what might appear to be a manifestation of subordination within the Godhead, he explained:

The willing subordination of the Son to the Father-and of the Spirit to the Father and to the Son-relates not to their essential life with the Trinity. Nor is it in any way inconsistent with true equality. It is a demonstration of the unity of purpose existing among the members of the Deity. Here the activities of one are seen to be but the carrying out of the united will.¹⁰³

In this way subordination was not based upon the nature or connected with the “essential life,” but it was rather described as “the unity of purpose” and “the united will” to accomplish their work. Dederen confirmed the “true equality” of the persons in the Trinity. It was this sharing of activity that he called the “divine economy.”¹⁰⁴

The Seventh-day Adventist 28 Fundamental Beliefs, first voted in 1980 (as 27 Fundamental Beliefs) and later expanded in 2005 (as 28 Fundamental Beliefs) provided a much clearer statement about Adventist beliefs than the semi-official 1931 statement that was gradually developed, voted and adopted afterward.¹⁰⁵ The changes needed in this new statement demonstrated how the topic was “increasingly debated within Adventism.” In principle “none of the [original] 27 beliefs were new,” however, the earlier 1931 statement contained “glaring omissions.” The new statement of beliefs included specific fundamental beliefs about the divinity of Christ and the Trinity.¹⁰⁶ The 1980 Fundamental

¹⁰² T. H. Jemison, *Christian Beliefs* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1959), 71, 84, 86, 85.

¹⁰³ Raoul Dederen, “Reflections on the Doctrine of the Trinity,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, 8/1 (January 1970), 15, 16, 17, 4, 20, 18.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁰⁵ The first vote happened in 1946 when the General Conference Session voted the 1931 Fundamental Beliefs which appeared in the *Church Manual*. “Proceedings of the General Conference,” *RH*, June 14, 1946, 197.

¹⁰⁶ Word in bracket is added. Lawrence T. Geray, “A New Statement of Fundamental Beliefs,” *Spectrum*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (1980): 3, 2, 3. Comparing the two Fundamental Beliefs one said that the 1980 one was “similar but more comprehensive.” General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist, Ministerial Association, *Seventh-day Adventist Believe . . . : Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1988), iv.

Beliefs made it explicit that “there is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of the three co-eternal persons.” The statement indicated that there is only one God who is “co-eternal.” The persons of the Trinity were each three distinct persons. Each existed from eternity past, including not only the Son, but also the Holy Spirit. “God the eternal Father is the creator, source, sustainer, and sovereign of all creation.” The Son “became incarnate in Jesus Christ.”¹⁰⁷ Thus the 1980 Fundamental Beliefs statement provided much greater clarity after decades of debate about the pre-existence of Jesus Christ, especially on this matter of what the term “eternity” meant.

What was up until then a rather ambiguous and debated topic about the Son’s “eternity” was clearly differentiated from many earlier groups, even if some groups from the margins of Adventism argued for a return to one of these earlier positions. Ellen G. White was the most significant influence in clarifying the nature and role of each of the divine persons within Seventh-day Adventist theology. She believed that the Son was co-eternal with the Father. This recognition led to the acceptance of the Holy Spirit as a person, co-eternal and of the same substance with the Father in the fullest sense. This paved the way for later theologians and statements that indicated the full acceptance of Holy Spirit within the Godhead.¹⁰⁸

Summary and Conclusion

A survey of each group shows the importance of the concept of Jesus Christ to the acceptance of the Trinity or Godhead among the Seventh-day Adventists. The first group who believed that Jesus Christ was a created being, even though He was divine but had a different substance to the Father, could not see Jesus Christ as being equal with the Father and He did not fit into the Godhead. Their teaching described Holy Spirit as only a power or energy. The second group accepted Jesus Christ as not created but “begotten” and still saw Him as an inferior divine person in relation to the Father. They understood the Son to possess a lower substance than that of the Father. They believed Jesus Christ did not fit into the Godhead, where there was only a place for the Father. This view was in line with their teaching on the Holy Spirit, that is that they still accepted Him as medium and not a person. The third group modified the idea that Jesus Christ was a fully subordinate God. They still assumed that the Father was superior to the Son. The adherents of this group freely called the Son Lord, rather than God since He was fully subordinate to the Father. He was subordinate, not just in the idea of His pre-existence-- He was not just self-existent, but also His divinity was diminished in the concept of His alleged power to give life He was viewed as fully dependent on the Father, even from His pre-existent. This idea made Jesus Christ to be effectively excluded from the Godhead. This concept was in line with the precept of Holy Spirit that He was seen as an impersonal power of God. The fourth group had a developing idea on the divinity of Christ. The supporters of this group believed that Jesus Christ was God. He had the same substance with the Father and had life and power in Himself. The only subordination was in the pre-existence. They

¹⁰⁷ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1981), 5.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. White, *Evangelism*, 615-617; Froom, *Coming of the Comforter*, 49; Andreasen, *Book of Hebrews*, 115-124; General Conference, *Questions on Doctrine*, 36; Jemison, *Christian Beliefs*, 90-94; Dederen, *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, 7-9; General Conference, *Yearbook* [1981], 5.

believed that Jesus Christ was “eternal” but not as eternal as the Father. However, as they came to see Jesus Christ as being God and that He had the same substance as that of the Father, they were led to accept Jesus Christ as part of the Godhead, as well as the Father and the Son being closely associated with the Holy Spirit. This group accepted the Holy Spirit as a person and He was understood to be a divine being, even though He was subordinate to the Father in the word of “eternity” as well as the Son. The fifth group acknowledged Jesus Christ as fully God, co-eternal and as possessing the same substance and nature with the Father. There was no time when the Son was not with the Father. This final position recognized the Son as being on the same level with the Father. This equality also extended to the Holy Spirit. These three persons were equal and none were subordinate in nature.

This study has sought to demonstrate this development of the understanding of the divinity of Christ in Seventh-day Adventist theology was parallel to the acceptance of the personality of Holy Spirit and it was this that finally directed them to the acceptance of the Trinity or three persons as co-eternal Beings in the Godhead. The nearer the concept of the divinity of Christ came to the concept of the nature, substance and attributes of the Father, the greater was the possibility for the acceptance of the Holy Spirit as a personal, divine being. All of this then led to the greater possibility for the acceptance of the doctrine of the Trinity. Thus, the concept of the divinity of Christ has had a significant impact on the acceptance of the Trinity doctrine into Seventh-day Adventist theology.