

Eternal Sonship

By John Witcombe

Within Adventism, differing views are currently being advocated on the nature of the relationship between the Son of God and the Father. Some scholars and clergy are teaching that the biblical language of “Son” and “Father” is figurative only, and must be understood metaphorically; others are advocating that the relationship be understood in a more literal manner. A recent advertisement for Ty Gibson’s just-released book, *The Sonship of Christ*, makes the claim: “Gibson creates a whole new theological lens through which to interpret the Trinitarian versus anti-Trinitarian debate that has been raging through much of Christian history.”¹ In view of this ongoing debate, even within Adventism, we can very well ask, “Who is teaching the truth regarding the sonship of Christ?”

If ever there was a time when the **writings of every one connected with our work should be closely criticized**, it is now.²

Those who try to bring in theories that would remove the pillars of our faith concerning the sanctuary, or **concerning the personality of God or of Christ**, are working as blind men. They are seeking to bring in uncertainties and to set the

people of God adrift, without an anchor. Those who claim to be identified with the message that God has given us should have keen, clear spiritual perceptions, that they may distinguish truth from error. ... The watchmen are to be wide-awake to discern the outcome of all specious reasoning, for **serious errors will be brought in to lead the people of God astray**.³

I believe that God has provided a correct understanding if we will accept it. Without help from the “visions in the last days,” many will be confused regarding the truth of the sonship of Christ. Therefore, I make no apology for primarily turning to this promised aid in helping us to understand this important matter.

I recommend to you, dear reader, the word of God as the rule of your faith and practice. By that Word we are to be judged. **God has, in that Word, promised to give visions in the “last days”**; not for a new rule of faith, but for the comfort of His people, and **to correct those who err from Bible truth**.⁴

Here is what is some in our church teach regarding the sonship of Christ:

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1. Pacific Press Publishing Association’s June 2019 advertisement mailer.
 2. Ellen G. White, Ms. 127, 1905, De. 19.
 3. Ellen G. White, Ms. 62, 1905, May 24.
 4. Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, p. 78, emphasis supplied, as in all quotations.

... the father-son image cannot be literally applied to the divine Father-Son relationship within the Godhead. The Son is not the natural, literal Son of the Father. ... **The term “Son” is used metaphorically when applied to the Godhead.**⁵

Another important consideration involves how we interpret the Bible. Here the issue pertains to whether we should interpret some passages literally or whether we may treat them more figuratively. Maybe we could illustrate it this way. While we often refer to Jesus as the Son and frequently call the first person of the Godhead the Father, do we really want to take such expressions in a totally literal way? Or would it be **more appropriate to interpret them in a more metaphorical way** that draws on selective aspects of sonship and fatherhood?⁶

It may be inferred from the Scriptures that when the Godhead laid out the plan of salvation at some point in eternity past, **They also took certain positions or roles** to carry out the provisions of the plan.⁷

Our Seventh-day Adventist pioneers did not believe that the Son of God was a figurative, metaphorical, role-playing Son. Rather, they believed that He was in reality the literal Son of God:

If we take the liberty to say there is not a literal Ark, containing the Ten Commandments in heaven, we may go only a step further and deny the literal City, and **the literal Son of God**. Certainly, Adventists should not choose the spiritual view, rather than the one we have presented. We see no middle ground to be taken.⁸

Christ is the only **literal Son of God**. The only begotten of the Father. John 1:14.⁹

There are two vitally important truths regarding the sonship of Christ that appear to be contradictory. The first truth is that the Son of God is eternal—He has existed from eternity.

The Word existed as a divine being, even as the **eternal Son of God**, in union and oneness with his Father. **From everlasting** he was the Mediator of the covenant, the one in whom all nations of the earth, both Jews and Gentiles, if they accepted him, were to be blessed.¹⁰

The Lord Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God, **existed from eternity**, a distinct person, yet one with the Father.¹¹

In speaking of His **pre-existence**, Christ carries the mind back through **dateless ages**. He assures us that **there never was a time when He was not in close fellowship with the eternal God**.

5. Ángel Rodríguez, *Adventist World*, Nov. 10 2015.

6. Woodrow Whidden, *The Trinity*, p. 94.

7. Frank Holbrook, *These Times*, June 1, 1981, p. 28.

8. James White, *Review and Herald*, June 9, 1851, Vol. 1, No. 13, p. 101.

9. J. G. Matteson, *Review and Herald*, Oct. 12, 1869.

10. Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, April 5, 1906.

11. Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, April 5, 1906.

He to whose voice the Jews were then listening had been with God as one brought up with Him.¹²

Then there is a second truth—that the Son of God is *begotten* of His Father. From the following statements, we see that Christ is truly the Son of God—“a Son begotten in the express image of the Father’s person” who has held this relationship with His Father from all eternity:

Christ is declared in the Scriptures to be the Son of God. **From all eternity He has sustained this relation to Jehovah.**¹³

When Christ first announced to the heavenly host His mission and work in the world, He declared that He was to leave His position of dignity and disguise His holy mission by assuming the likeness of a man, **when in reality He was the Son of the infinite God.**¹⁴

A complete offering has been made; for “God so loved the world, that **he gave his only-begotten Son,**”—not a son by creation, as were the angels, nor a son by adoption, as is the forgiven sinner, but **a Son begotten** in the express image of the Father’s person, and in all the brightness of his majesty and glory, one equal with God in authority, dignity, and divine perfection. In him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.¹⁵

“... but a Son **begotten** ...” The word “begotten” in the above statement is a verb, an action word. “Unique” is not an adequate synonym for the word “begotten.” The word “unique,” which is an adjective modifier, cannot be used as a substitute for the verb “begotten” in this statement. A verb and an adjective have completely different functions in the English language.

So, in summary, here are the two contradictory thoughts:

1. Christ is the **eternal** Son of God—there never was a time when the Son was not with the Father.
2. And yet, Christ is the **begotten** Son of the Father. Being God’s Son is speaking of His very nature—“a Son begotten in the express image of the Father’s person.”

According to our human understanding, these two concepts cannot exist together. And, perhaps, for this reason, Ellen White penned the following important words:

The Lord Jesus Christ, the **divine Son of God, existed from eternity**, a distinct person, yet **one with the Father**. He was the surpassing glory of heaven. He was the commander of the heavenly intelligences, and the adoring homage of the angels was received by him as his right. This was no robbery of God. “The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way,” he declares, “before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there

12. Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, Aug. 29, 1900.

13. Ellen G. White, Ms. 22, 1905, March 7.

14. Ellen G. White, Letter 303, 1903, Aug. 29, to J. H. Kellogg.

15. Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, May 30, 1895.

were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth; while as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth.” There are light and glory in **the truth that Christ was one with the Father before the foundation of the world was laid**. This is the light shining in a dark place, making it resplendent with divine, original glory. **This truth**, infinitely mysterious in itself, explains other mysterious and otherwise unexplainable truths, while it is enshrined in light, unapproachable and incomprehensible.¹⁶

What truth is infinitely mysterious and incomprehensible? It is the truth of the divine Son of God’s eternal oneness with the Father. **“Eternal sonship” is an oxymoron**. If Christ is eternal, how can He be a Son? The answer “is enshrined in light, unapproachable and incomprehensible.”

There were some Seventh-day Adventist pioneers who sought to explain what was unexplainable. They spoke where silence is golden. They brought in an explanation that attempted to remove some of the mystery. They sought to dispel the light within which this mystery is to remain enshrined. They approached the unapproachable; they sought to comprehend the incomprehensible. Here is an example of what they wrote:

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.¹⁷

Remember, God “promised to give visions in the ‘last days’ ... to correct those who err from Bible truth.” Elder Waggoner’s understanding of the pre-existence of the eternal Son of God needed to be corrected. He was teaching that there was a time, way back in the days of eternity, when the Father and His Son were not existing in close fellowship. He was teaching that there was a point in time when they began a relationship of close fellowship. Here is God’s correction to this error:

In speaking of His **pre-existence**, Christ carries the mind back through **dateless ages**. He assures us that **there never was a time when He was not in close fellowship with the eternal God**. He to whose voice the Jews were then listening had been with God as one brought up with Him.¹⁸

The context of this phrase, “there never was a time when He was not in close fellowship with the eternal God” is not addressing the issue of whether the Father and His Son were ever at odds with one another. No, that has never been a matter that needed to be addressed. The issue that is being addressed is Christ’s pre-existence. This is the issue that Elder Waggoner, Uriah Smith, and many of their brethren needed help with, and they received it on August 29, 1900. As we have seen in the statement above, the incomprehensible mystery of the eternal Son of God is once again set forth.

16. Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, April 5, 1906.

17. E. J. Waggoner, *Christ and His Righteousness*, 1892, pp. 21, 22.

18. Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, Aug. 29, 1900.

Our non-Trinitarian brethren today also speculate on this point, using the creation of Eve with a rib from Adam to illustrate how the Son of God was begotten. They use the rock cut out of the mountain without hands as another illustration. Ellen White stayed away from all these speculative explanations, and we would do well to follow her example. There is no need to define the word “begotten” as it relates to the Son of God. The word “begotten” is in the realm of truth that “is enshrined in light, unapproachable and incomprehensible.”

Ellen White did not chasten our pioneers for their suppositions, which they believed the Bible warranted. Rather, on numerous occasions, she very emphatically and without reservation endorsed Uriah Smith’s book, *Daniel and the Revelation*, even though he speculated in his book about there being a point in time in eternity past when the Son was brought forth. This viewpoint, of which Ellen White and God were well aware, was held by many of our pioneers. However, it was not considered a dangerous, heretical view that needed to be corrected before their books went out to the public. Ellen White would subsequently gently correct this erroneous view in her writings.

Then, on the other side of the Trinity debate, we have church leaders who attempt to remove the mystery from the eternal sonship of Christ by teaching that Christ was not the Son of God by nature before coming to this world, but, rather, that sonship only refers to what took place at the incarnation.

The Father, Son relationship in the New Testament, must always be understood in the light of the event of Bethlehem. The only child born into this world with a divine rather than a human father is Jesus. **The title “son” refers to His entry into time** and does not deny at all His eternal origins. **There are references in the Old Testament to “sonship” but these are always in anticipation of the incarnation.**¹⁹

Sonship is not His innate, eternal identity, but rather a role He took up for a purpose. ... But all of this meaningful and beautiful gospel theology is lost if we push the Sonship of Christ off into some unique identity that He alone possesses from eternity past. None of Paul’s narrative logic makes any sense if we work from the premise that Jesus is God’s Son in an ancient, ontological sense. ... It is precisely because Jesus is the offspring of the woman that He is the Son of God. The incarnation was the act by which He became the Son of God.²⁰

Notice that He will “therefore ... be *called* the Son of God.” It is a conferred title, a missional moniker in Luke’s telling, not a description of His intrinsic, pre-incarnate identity. He will be *called* the Son of God precisely because He was conceived in Mary’s womb by a miracle, as was Isaac, **not because He always was the Son of God by nature before coming to our world.**²¹

Is this teaching in conflict with the Spirit of Prophecy? Notice the following statement:

19. J. R. Hoffman, “Is Jesus Jehovah God?” *Ministry Magazine*, June 1982, p. 24.

20. Ty Gibson, *The Sonship of Christ*, pp. 108, 119, 128.

21. Ty Gibson, *The Sonship of Christ*, p. 85.

Christ is declared in the Scriptures to be the Son of God. **From all eternity He has sustained this relation to Jehovah. ... In His incarnation he gained in a new sense the title of the Son of God.** Said the angel to Mary, “The power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing that shall be born of thee shall be *called* the Son of God.” [Luke 1:35.] While the son of a human being, **Christ became the Son of God in a new sense.** Thus He stood in our world—the Son of God, yet allying Himself by birth to the human race.²²

Being *called* the Son of God refers solely to Christ becoming the Son of God in a *new sense* when He became the son of a human being. If the moniker “Son of God” only referred to what would someday take place in the incarnation and if that were the only meaning for the title “Son of God” in His pre-incarnation existence, then, at His incarnation, the title “Son of God” would not have taken on any “new sense.” The sense and the meaning of the title would have remained exactly the same. Only with the understanding that Christ was the Son of God “in an ancient, ontological sense” (original sense) can there be a “new sense” when He came into this world as the incarnate “son of a human being.”

Ty Gibson’s book, *The Sonship of Christ*, beautifully presents the story regarding the Son of God becoming the Son of God in a “new sense” at His incarnation. The “new sense” second Adam with covenantal sonship is a most precious truth. If Gibson’s book simply taught this verity, his book would not hurt the cause of truth. However, the book actively denies Christ’s original sense of sonship, thereby obscuring a most vital truth regarding the personality of God.

Jesus gave a discourse to the Jews, recorded in John 5, in which He fully explained to them His sonship.

Jesus knew that the Jews were determined to take his life, yet **in this discourse he fully explained to them his Sonship, the relation he bore to the Father** and his equality with him.²³

In this discourse, Jesus spoke of the relationship that He sustained to His Father and thus His equality with Him. They clearly understood that His sonship had to do with the original, “very highest sense” of the ontological relationship He bore to His Father and not to a “new sense” covenantal sonship.

“Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill Him because He not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was His Father, making himself equal with God.” The whole nation called God their Father, and if Jesus had done this in the same sense in which they did, the Pharisees would not have been so enraged. But they accused Jesus of blasphemy, showing that they understood that **Christ claimed God as His Father in the very highest sense.**²⁴

22. Ellen G. White, Ms. 22, 1905, March 7.

23. Ellen G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 2, p. 172.

24. Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, March 5, 1901.

Notwithstanding the Son of God was clothed with humanity [*His sonship in a new sense*], yet Jehovah, with his own voice, assures him of his **sonship with the Eternal** [*sonship to His Father in the original, very highest, ontological sense*].²⁵

Notice carefully the contrast in thought in the two appraisals below:

Ty Gibson: “He will be *called* the Son of God precisely because He was conceived in Mary’s womb by a miracle, as was Isaac, **not because He always was the Son of God by nature before coming to our world.**” (page 91)

Ellen White: “**Christ is declared in the Scriptures to be the Son of God. From all eternity He has sustained this relation to Jehovah.**”

Christ has always been the Son of God by His very nature. From all eternity, He has sustained this relationship (that is, sonship) to Jehovah His Father.

The teaching that Christ’s sonship was “not His innate, eternal identity” and that it had no ontological or literal basis but only an incarnational or metaphorical basis *obscures* the fact that Christ was the only begotten Son of God *from all eternity*. This obscuring of Christ’s sonship began in heaven. It lies at the very foundation for the rebellion that resulted in the great controversy between Christ and Satan, which began in heaven and is now being carried out here on earth, albeit from a slightly different angle. In heaven, the rebellious angels ignored the fact of Christ’s sonship and of the exalted authority that this relationship to the Father would give to Him. On earth, erroneous teachings have been fostered that have taught men to believe that there is no literal Son of God, that the divine being who assumed the role of sonship is not really the Son of God but is an ontologically unrelated, identical being to the divine One who assumed the role of Father. Satan’s jealousy of Christ knows no bounds. He hates the Son of God so much that he is determined to *obscure* the knowledge of this close, intimate Father-Son relationship:

Angels were expelled from heaven because they would not work in harmony with God. They fell from their high estate because they wanted to be exalted. They had come to exalt themselves, and they forgot that their beauty of person and of character came from the Lord Jesus. **This fact the angels would *obscure*, that Christ was the only begotten Son of God**, and they came to consider that they were not to consult Christ. One angel began the controversy and carried it on until there was rebellion in the heavenly courts among the angels. They were lifted up because of their beauty.²⁶

It should be noted that the fallen angels could not be *obscuring* the idea of Christ’s becoming the Son of God in a new sense when He would come to this earth, if man should fall, for, at this point in time, the angels knew nothing of the hidden plan that God’s Son would become surety for fallen humanity.

25. Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, Jan. 21, 1873.

26. Ellen G. White, Letter 42, 1910, April 29, to D. A. Parsons.

Satan and his angels could only have been *obscuring* the fact that Christ was the only begotten Son of God in the natural, or literal, ontological sense.

The loyal angels and God Himself, on the other side of the great controversy, defended Christ's only begotten sonship.

Angels that were loyal and true sought to reconcile this mighty, rebellious angel to the will of his Creator. ... **They clearly set forth that Jesus was the Son of God**, existing with him before the angels were created; and that he had ever stood at the right hand of God, and his mild, loving authority had not heretofore been questioned ...²⁷

His beauty was so highly exalted that he thought he should be as God, and Christ must be second to him; but **the Lord informed Satan** this could not be possible. **Christ was His only begotten Son.**²⁸

It is the Father-Son relationship that gives significance to the word "gave" in John 3:16. One cannot *give* what one does not *possess*. God the Father, truly and literally—not metaphorically or symbolically—*possessed* a Son that He could *give* to save humanity.

And the Son of God declares concerning Himself: "The Lord **possessed** Me in the beginning of His way, before the works of old. I was set up from everlasting. ... When He appointed the foundations of the earth, then was I with Him, as one brought up with Him; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him." [Proverbs 8:22, 23, 29, 30.]²⁹

Only a father can *possess* and therefore *give* a son. A son does not have the prerogative to *give* his father because a son does not have authority over his father. Isaac could not have *given* his father Abraham. God the Father alone can *give* His Son. And He can *give* His Son precisely because He is the Father. This literal relationship established the prerogative for the Father, in great self-sacrificial love, to give His Son as a gift to save this fallen world.

The Scriptures clearly indicate the relation between God and Christ, and they bring to view as clearly the personality and individuality of each. ... **God is the Father of Christ; Christ is the Son of God.** To Christ has been given an exalted position. He has been made equal with the Father. All the counsels of God are opened to His Son. Jesus said to the Jews: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. ... The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do: for what things soever He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son, and showeth Him all things that Himself doeth." John 5:17–20. **Here again are brought to view the personalities of God and the Son**, showing the unity that exists between them.³⁰

27. Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, Jan. 9, 1879.

28. Ellen G. White, Letter 157, 1910, to H. W. Cottrell.

29. Ellen G. White, Letter 256, 1906, Aug. 1, to Ministering Brethren in Australia, quoting from *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 1890, p. 34.

30. Ellen G. White, Ms. 111, 1903; 8T 269, "is brought to view the personality of the Father."

The personality of the Father and His Son includes the fatherhood of God and the sonship of Christ. This original sense of sonship did not begin with His incarnation, otherwise, this personality of sonship would have been tied to His incarnation. But it wasn't.

O what a gift God has made to our world! The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. **God sent His own Son** in the likeness of sinful flesh, liable to physical infirmities, tempted in all points like as we are. **He was the Son of the living God. His personality did not begin with His incarnation in the flesh.**³¹

Again, carefully notice the contrast in thought in the appraisals below:

Ty Gibson: "The incarnation was the act by which He became the Son of God." (page 128)

Ellen White: "His **personality [as the Son of the living God] did not begin with His incarnation** in the flesh."

God, through His prophet, could not have said this plainer:

Who is this that was to come to our world and become incarnate? The only begotten Son of God. ... "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old," Christ says. "When he gave to the sea his decree that the waters should not pass his commandment: when He appointed the foundations of the earth: Then was I by Him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him." [Proverbs 8:22, 29, 30.]³²

Christ is the Son of God, and His angels do His bidding; for **He was even the Son of the Father** who so loved the world that **He gave His only begotten Son** to experience in our world all the inconveniences to be passed through in fulfilling His missions, in suffering with humanity.³³

The teaching that denies literal sonship also denies the literal fatherhood of God. In doing so, it undermines an aspect of His great love for us, which He wants us to understand. God created family relationships here on this earth to give us and a watching universe an insight into the intimate relationship the Father has with His Son. Understanding this relationship helps all to see "how unutterable was the self-denial of the infinite God in giving His own Son to die to rescue man from utter ruin." We see this illustrated in the story of Abraham and Isaac:

God would impress upon Abraham the gospel of salvation to man. In order to do this, and make the truth a reality to him as well as to test his faith, He required him to slay his darling Isaac. All the sorrow and agony that Abraham endured through that dark and fearful trial were for the purpose of deeply impressing upon his understanding the plan of redemption for fallen man. He was made to understand in his own experience **how unutterable was the self-denial of the infinite God in**

31. Ellen G. White, Letter 77, 1894. Aug. 3, to Bro. Scazighini.

32. Ellen G. White, Ms. 37, 1898, March 10.

33. Ellen G. White, Letter 383, 1908, May 29, to Brethren in Washington, D.C.

giving His own Son to die to rescue man from utter ruin. To Abraham no mental torture could be equal to that which he endured in obeying the divine command to sacrifice his son.³⁴

O how wonderful, how almost incredible it is, that the infinite God would consent to the humiliation of **his own dear Son!**³⁵

The sonship of Christ and the fatherhood of God is a most precious truth that is the very foundation of the Christian faith. John 3:16 loses meaning if we accept the role-playing, metaphorical, figurative views that are currently taught by some in our church. Jesus told Nicodemus: “For God so loved the world that **He gave His only begotten Son ...**”

It is taught by some in our church that Ellen White, early on in her prophetic ministry, expressed her understanding of the relationship between the Father and His Son in a manner that implied headship of the Father over His Son. It is believed that Ellen White held Semi-Arian views similar to what her fellow pioneers believed and gave expression to those views in some of her writings. For example, the following statements do not reflect our current egalitarian Trinitarian thought:

The great Creator assembled the heavenly host, that he might in the presence of all the angels **confer special honor upon his Son**. The Son was seated on the throne with the Father, and the heavenly throng of holy angels was gathered around them. The Father then made known **that it was ordained by himself that Christ, his Son, should be equal with himself**; so that wherever was the presence of his Son, it was as his own presence. The word of the Son was to be obeyed as readily as the word of the Father. **His Son he had invested with authority to command the heavenly host**. Especially was his Son to work in union with himself in the anticipated creation of the earth and every living thing that should exist upon the earth. His Son would carry out his will and his purposes, **but would do nothing of himself alone**. The Father’s will would be fulfilled in him. Satan was envious and jealous of Jesus Christ. ... Why should Christ thus be honored before himself? ... There was contention among the angels. Satan and his sympathizers were striving to reform the government of God. They were discontented and unhappy because they could not look into his unsearchable wisdom and **ascertain his purposes in exalting his Son Jesus, and endowing him with such unlimited power and command**.³⁶

The Son of God was **next in authority** to the great Lawgiver.³⁷

To Christ **has been given** an exalted position. He **has been made** equal with the Father.³⁸

34. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 369.

35. Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, August 21, 1888.

36. Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, Jan. 9, 1879.

37. Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, Dec. 17, 1872.

38. Ellen G. White, Ms. 111, 1903, Oct. 22.

On March 2, 2019, Elder Ted Wilson, president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, in an interview at Andrews University, was asked a question on the Trinity. In his six-minute response he made this comment:

So I would beg with those especially around the world who seem to be so passionate and so fervent in going back to what they say was our pioneer's viewpoint [*in context, he is talking about the pioneer's Semi-Arian view*]. Ellen White did not hold that **after a certain time**.³⁹

In other words, Elder Wilson is saying that Ellen White did hold to the pioneer's Semi-Arian viewpoint up to a certain time. The only evidence that he would have for this statement would be from what Ellen White wrote. Perhaps he might think that those statements quoted above reflect that early Semi-Arian view which she changed later in life. It is true; those statements do not reflect classical egalitarian Trinitarian thought. But could it be that classical egalitarian Trinitarian thought is wrong? Are we willing to undermine the confidence of our church in the gift of prophecy by stating that some of her early writings do not teach truth? Was she wrong or are our modern-day scholars wrong?

To reject classical egalitarian Trinitarian views does not mean that one rejects the belief in the Heavenly Trio.

There are three living persons of the heavenly trio; in the name of these three great powers—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—those who receive Christ by living faith are baptized, and these powers will co-operate with the obedient subjects of heaven in their efforts to live the new life in Christ.⁴⁰

This statement above does not conflict with those earlier statements that imply that the Father is indeed the head of Christ as Paul states in 1 Corinthians:

But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. (1 Corinthians 11:3)

There is no evidence that Ellen White ever changed her published views on the Godhead or on any other doctrine "after a certain time." Nothing that she wrote regarding the Godhead ever had to be retracted. Her views from early on remained her views until her death (take note of the dates of the statements used in this paper). The growth in her understanding of God did not change her views from "Semi-Arian" to Trinitarian. Her early views were neither Semi-Arian nor classical Trinitarianism.

We see in the following statement that Ellen White did not ever write an erroneous statement regarding biblical truth; therefore, nothing that she ever wrote regarding the relationship between the Father and His Son was inaccurate.

39. <https://www.facebook.com/PastorTedWilson/videos/409114666515631/> (time stamp: -25:00 to -19:00).

40. Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 615.

I am now looking over my diaries and copies of letters written for several years back.... I have the most precious matter to reproduce and place before the people in testimony form. While I am able to do this work, the people must have things to revive past history, that they may see that there is one straight chain of truth, **without one heretical sentence, in that which I have written.** This, I am instructed, is to be a living letter to all in regard to my faith.⁴¹

That which I have written is what the Lord has bidden me write. **I have not been instructed to change that which I have sent out.** I stand firm in the Adventist faith; for I have been warned in regard to the seducing sophistries that will seek for entrance among us as a people. The Scripture says, "Some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils." I present before our people the danger of being led astray as were the angels in the heavenly courts. **The straight line of truth presented to me when I was but a girl is just as clearly presented to me now.**⁴²

Certainly she wrote things later in life that she had not written earlier on, and the reason for that is that God needed to bring greater clarity because erroneous views of certain church members needed correction. Ellen White always believed, "In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived."⁴³ This description of the life He possessed is a description of divinity, which both the Father and the Son possess. As amazing as it may sound, all of Christ's followers possess this divine life as a free gift from God by faith.

In Him was life, original, unborrowed, underived. This life is not inherent in man. He can possess it only through Christ. He cannot earn it; **it is given him as a free gift if he will believe in Christ as his personal Saviour.**⁴⁴

This statement was not a seismic shift of belief as many teach. She always believed and taught that the life of the Son was identical to the life of His Father—who is the express image of His person.

From my girlhood I have been given plain instruction that God is a person, and that Christ is "the express image of His person." God always has been. **That which concerns us is not the how or the wherefore.**⁴⁵

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has had an understanding of God, informed by the ministry of a living prophet of God, which is unique in Christianity. Our view of the Heavenly Trio is not the same as that of the Catholics or her Protestant daughters. We stand alone. Let us embrace the mysterious, incomprehensible truth of the *eternal* sonship of Christ.

41. Ellen G. White, Letter 329a, 1905, Nov. 16, to Mabel White.

42. Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, Jan. 26, 1905.

43. Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 530.

44. Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, Feb. 13, 1912.

45. Ellen G. White, Ms. 137, 1903, Oct. 22; cf. *Experience and Views*, p. 64.