

## **A role-playing Godhead – current Seventh-day Adventist theology.**

**NOTE: Includes article by Angel Manuel Rodriguez entitled, ‘A Question of Sonship’. Delaing with the role-playing issue in Seventh-day Adventism**

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In 1981 concerning the trinity doctrine, in one of our own denominational publications, a reader posed a question. This was the year after the trinity doctrine was first voted into our fundamental beliefs (1980).

The reader said

***“I am a fledgling Christian and am mystified by the doctrine of the Trinity.”(These times – our times, June 1<sup>st</sup> 1981, ‘Frank answers’)***

It is more than likely that many Christians, even those who are very experienced in matters of a spiritual nature, could make this same confession but what was it about this teaching that mystified this particular person? The reader asked

***“To whom should I address my prayers?” (Ibid)***

In replying to this question, Pastor Holbrook (a contributing editor of ‘These times – our times’) wrote

***“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.” (Ibid)***

Here we are asked, in one of our official publications, to believe that sometime in eternity the three persons of the Godhead decided upon who should pretend to be the Father, who should pretend to be the Son and who should pretend to be the Holy Spirit – albeit according to Holbrook, this is what is “inferred from the Scriptures”.

I use the word ‘pretend’ because if a person claims to be someone (or something) they are not, then they are

only acting out (role-playing) this part. This is what is being said here – “They also took *certain positions or roles* to carry out the provisions of the plan”.

**Now why would anyone say that this ‘role-playing’ (acting/pretending) is “inferred” in the Scriptures - meaning not actually stated?**

As far as I can see there can only be one reason. This is if it was decided that the designations of Father, Son and Holy Spirit could not be taken literally – also that nothing can be found saying they are only role-playing these parts. What other reason would there be? This is where we need to exercise the ‘rule of thumb’. This is the rule that says that everything in the Scriptures should be taken literally – unless of course it is impossible to do so.

Through the spirit of prophecy we have received this counsel

**“The truths most plainly revealed in the Bible have been involved in doubt and darkness by learned men, who, with a pretense of great wisdom, teach that the Scriptures have a mystical, a secret, spiritual meaning not apparent in the language employed. These men are false teachers. *It was to such a class that Jesus declared: 'Ye know not the Scriptures, neither the power of God.'* Mark 12:24.” (Ellen G. White, Great Controversy, page 598, 1911 edition, 'The Scriptures a safeguard)**

There then came the counsel applicable to our study. It said

**“The language of the Bible should be explained according to its obvious meaning, unless a symbol or figure is employed. *Christ has given the promise: 'If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine.'* John 7:17. If men would but take the Bible as it reads, if there were no false teachers to mislead and confuse their minds, a work would be accomplished that would make angels glad and that would bring into the fold of Christ thousands upon thousands who are now wandering in error.” (Ibid)**

In the Scriptures there is no mention of the three persons of the Godhead pretending to be (acting/role-playing) what they are not. This is why Holbrook said (in his thinking) that this is only “inferred” in the Scriptures.

So what reason do we have to say that these three persons were pretending to be what they were not? In other words, if Jesus said He was the Son of God – which as we have seen is exactly what He did claim to be – then why should we say that He is not really a son? This Sonship relationship with the Father is not impossible.

Looking at it another way, if Christ was not truly a son, wouldn't He be guilty of leading people to believe falsehoods? I ask this because from what Jesus said concerning Himself (that He is the Son of God), my personal belief is that He really is a son. This means that if He is not a son, then He has caused me to believe something which is not true. At the very least He has confused me. As we have seen, Christ did not confuse or mislead anyone.

God, through the spirit of prophecy, has confirmed that Jesus really is His son. As we shall see later, the Holy Spirit – which the Scriptures reveal as both the Father and the Son omnipresent (see John 14:18, 23) – really is a holy spirit. He certainly is not pretending to be one.

Using distinctly trinitarian language Holbrook later said

*“God the Son agreed to step down from His exalted position to be man’s Saviour by becoming incarnate. God the Son is truly God, but He became truly human, as well. He is the God-Man. By so doing He became a kind of “second” Adam (see Romans 5:14, last part), the representative head of the race. In this position He could rightfully bear the liabilities of humanity.” (These times – our times, June 1<sup>st</sup> 1981, ‘Frank answers’)*

Nowhere in the Scriptures can the expression “God the Son” be found. What can be found is the terminology ‘the Son of God’ – which is saying something entirely different. When it is reasoned through, if this divine person (the second person of the Godhead) is not really a son then why should He be called “God the Son”? The only reason could be if He is said to be role-playing (acting) the part.

What Holbrook meant by saying that the incarnate Son is a “*kind of “second” Adam*” I find very difficult to understand. The Scriptures tell us that in taking upon Himself our fallen human nature, the Son of God did actually become the second Adam – or as the Scriptures put it - “the last Adam” (see 1 Corinthians 15:45). This was not make-believe on Christ’s part. This was for real. Christ was not role-playing (pretending to be) what He was not. He really and truly is “the last [final, uttermost] Adam”.

Again using trinitarian language Holbrook later says

*“God the Holy Spirit is the one who applies to the individual mind the redemption Christ worked out by His life and death.” (Ibid)*

Needless to say, neither can the terminology “God the Holy Spirit” be found in Scripture. Nowhere either can these two terms (“God the Son” and “God the Holy Spirit”) be found in the spirit of prophecy writings. It is trinitarian language.

In answer to the reader’s question, also in the light of his own trinity reasoning, Holbrook wrote

*“Since the Trinity is active in behalf of man’s redemption, it is really not out of place to address any member of the Deity in prayer.” (Ibid)*

In the Scriptures, no one is seen directly addressing the Holy Spirit in prayer (or in any other way) but God is addressed *through* the Spirit of God (see Romans 8:26 etc). In the spirit of prophecy as well as in the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit is not spoken of as a person exactly like God and Christ are persons although He can rightly be termed a person. We shall see that His nature cannot be understood by humanity.

Holbrook concluded by saying

*“While it is the usual practice to pray to the Father (see Acts 4:24 ff.), Scripture records the martyr Stephen’s brief prayer to Jesus (chap. 7:59, 60); some Christian hymns, such as Isaac Watts’s ‘Come, Holy Spirit, Heavenly Dove,’ are essentially prayers to the third person of the Godhead.” (Ibid)*

For ‘proof’ of his reasoning that we can pray to the Holy Spirit, Holbrook does not appeal to Scripture but instead refers to “some Christian hymns”.

By way of summary, it appears that Holbrook is saying that each one of the three divine personalities is exactly the same. This would mean that regardless of which one ‘became flesh’, that particular divine personage would still be called the Son of God. According to this reasoning, any of them could have taken the roles of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It would not have made any difference.

In the book 'The Trinity', Woodrow Whidden says much the same thing. He explained

*“But what about direct prayer to the Holy Spirit? While we have no clear example of or direct command to pray to the Spirit in Scripture, doing so does have, in principle, some implicit biblical support. If the Spirit is indeed divine and personal and He interacts in all sorts of direct personal ways (bringing conviction, healing, transforming grace, granting gifts, etc.), it only seems logical that God’s people can pray directly to and worship the Holy Spirit.”*  
(Woodrow Whidden, *The Trinity*, page 273, ‘Practical implications and conclusions’)

## **A triune role-playing Godhead**

In a 1996 week of prayer reading, Gordon Jenson (who was then the President of Spicer Memorial College of Pune, India) informed Seventh-day Adventists world-wide (this must have been approved by our church before it was published)

*“A plan of salvation was encompassed in the covenant made by the Three Persons of the Godhead, who possessed the attributes of Deity equally. In order to eradicate sin and rebellion from the universe and to restore harmony and peace, one of the divine Beings accepted, and entered into, the role of the Father, another the role of the Son.”* (Gordon Jenson, *Adventist Review*, October 31, 1996, p.12 Week of Prayer readings, ‘article ‘Jesus the Heavenly Intercessor)

Again we see the idea of a role-playing Godhead suggested. This would have been read by all who participated in this ‘week of prayer’ reading. Were you one of those who in 1996 participated? Can you remember agreeing with this role-playing Godhead concept?

Jenson also said

*“The remaining divine Being, the Holy Spirit, was also to participate in effecting the plan of salvation. All of this took place before sin and rebellion transpired in heaven.”*

*(Ibid)*

It does appear that Jenson could not bring himself to say that the third person of the Godhead was only role-playing the part of a holy spirit (pretending to be a holy spirit) but what other conclusion can be drawn? In other words, the reality of the Holy Spirit actually being a holy spirit is lost. In this reasoning, the Holy Spirit is depicted as a person exactly like the Father and the Son. In other words, the Holy Spirit is a ‘third person’ – albeit exactly like the other two persons - acting out the role of a holy spirit.

He later said

*“As sin progressively developed in heaven and later, on earth, so the plan to deal with it was progressively revealed—the divine Beings entered into the roles they had agreed upon before the foundations of the world were laid (see 1 Peter 1:20).”*

*(Ibid)*

Notice here that each of the persons of the Godhead are said to have chosen to role-play their various parts. If this were true, then in the plan of redemption they were all pretending to be what they were not. It appears to be said that the actually entering in of the roles did not take place until after sin had broken out.

One of the questions pertaining to this reading was

“How would *you explain the separate roles of the Godhead* in human salvation to a non-Christian?”  
(*Ibid*)

If I believed the persons of the Godhead were only role-playing these parts then my answer to Holbrook’s question would be - “with great difficulty”. On the other hand, if I were not a Christian - and I was asked to believe that the three persons only role-played these parts - I would ask why, instead of confusing people by saying they were someone or something they were not, they could not be called what they were in reality.

### **An objection submitte to ‘Role Playing’**

Under the heading “More Than Role-playing”, an objection was made to Gordon Jenson’s article. It was sent by email and was signed by Herman J. Smit - who was then the President of the Greek Mission.

Smit said (referring to Jenson’s remarks about a role-playing Godhead)

*“That's like writing a dramatic theater play, for which some persons take on specific roles and then, after the performance, change clothes and look as they did before entering the dressing rooms.” (Herman J. Smit, President Greek Mission, Review and Herald, Adventist Review, December 26<sup>th</sup> 1996)*

This more or less sums up this role-playing idea. He then said

*“Of course, the Holy Scriptures are a precipitation of God's involvement with this planet and its inhabitants; many things are said in a human way. But do we honestly believe that it was like this when our salvation was thoroughly planned and set into motion? Distributing roles?” (Ibid)*

Smit seems to be agreeing that the three persons were not really a father, son and holy spirit but are said to be these things simply for us as humans to be able to understand God’s participation in our salvation. As he said, these things are just “said in a human way”. It appears therefore that he is not really complaining about the idea itself (that the three persons of the Godhead were role-playing) – but just the use of words saying they were ‘role-playing’. He did not seem to like this very much.

He continued

*“How does this relate to John 3:16? In loving us, God gave His only- begotten Son. He didn't need to take on a role. Do the unfallen worlds not need a father? Is God only our Father? If God the Son does not need to act as a Saviour on behalf of the unfallen worlds, isn't He still their Creator, God the Son, or is He a nameless one of the Three?” (Ibid)*

Regarding the Holy Spirit, Smit wrote

*“Speaking about the Holy Spirit as sort of a third- choice "remaining divine Being" sounds like handing out a "price of comfort" for the less fortunate. For the Comforter, a too-human description.” (Ibid)*

Nothing else was said by Smit concerning the Holy Spirit but he obviously realised that Jenson was saying that this third person of the Godhead was only said to be role-playing (acting) this part. He concluded



*“Please, let us be careful in wording the Trinity's initiative in regard to the redemption of humankind. I would still like to cling to the old Nicene Creed— certainly with my Orthodox fellow Christians in mind.” (Ibid)*

As has been said already, it looks as though Smit was objecting to the words ‘role-playing’ being used rather than the concept itself. He seems to think it would be upsetting for his “Orthodox fellow Christians”. Personally speaking, I believe it is upsetting for all who believe that God really is the Father of Christ and that Christ really is the Son of God – also that the Holy Spirit really is what He is said to be - a holy spirit.

It does say in the Seventh-day Adventist explanation of their beliefs

*“The Father seems to act as source, the Son as mediator, and the Spirit as actualizer or applier.” (Seventh-day Adventists Believe, page 30, 2005, 'The Godhead')*

Here it is said that the three persons *only seem to act* as a source (the Father), a mediator (the Son) and an applier (the Holy Spirit). In other words, they are only role-playing these parts.

It concludes

*“In the economy of function, different members of the Godhead perform distinct tasks in saving man.” (Ibid page 31)*

This was the same as said in the book 'The Trinity' by Woodrow Whidden. He wrote

*“While the three divine persons are one, They have taken different roles or positions in the Godhead's work of creation, redemption, and the loving administration of the universe. The Father has assumed overall leadership, the Son has subordinated Himself to the leadership of the Father, and the Spirit is voluntarily subordinate to both the Father and the Son.” (Woodrow Whidden, The Trinity, page 243, 'Why the Trinity is important – part 1')*

If it were true (which I do not believe it is) that the three persons of the Godhead took different roles (meaning they were just role playing the parts of Father, Son and Holy Spirit) I could understand it regarding the plan of redemption but why would it be necessary to do this regarding creation. Why could they not tell the entire universe who they really were without pretending to be someone and something they were not? What sense does that make? This is tantamount to telling lies (deceiving people)

The strange thing is that Whidden says on page 248, 268 and 269 (note the highlighted sections)

*“The heart of His [God's] plan has been sacrificially to give His own divine Son to come and be one with us as a man to show us what godly love is really all about... The solution to the problem of evil has and will continue to come from none other than God Himself in the person and work of His Son. He has thrust Himself into the battle against suffering and evil. And how has He involved Himself? Through sending His very own divine Son as a solution to the horrid blot that evil has spread across creation... But the sin emergency did not catch the Holy Trinity off guard. They had conceived a plan in which God would send His very own Son to our world to meet Satan in hand-to-hand combat.” (Woodrow Whidden, The Trinity, page 248, 268 and 269, 'Why the Trinity is important – part 1')*

How can anyone say that Christ is only role-playing the part of a son (pretending to be a son) and then use words that seem to say that in reality He is truly God's Son (i. e. “His *own* divine Son”... “His *very own* divine Son” and “God would send *His very own* Son”? It does not seem possible.

### **All three exactly the same? (Seventh-day Adventist theology)**

One very well known minister who spoke of what he termed the “interchangeableness” of the three personalities of the Godhead (this is exactly the same concept as role-playing) was J. R. Spangler.

In an article called ‘I believe in the Triune God’ he wrote in 1971

*“The gospel commission commands surrendered souls to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.” (J. R. Spangler, Review and Herald, Oct. 21, 1971, ‘I believe in the Triune God’, see also Australasian Record 6<sup>th</sup> December 1971)*

As an associate secretary of the General Conference Ministerial Association, Spangler was referring here to Matthew 28:19. He then says with respect to 2 Corinthians 13:14 (which says “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.”)

*“The apostolic benediction lists the Three and names Christ first. Paul usually places God the Father first, but here it is reversed. To me this signifies the interchangeableness of the members of the Godhead since they are one in action and purpose.” (Ibid)*

To the best of my knowledge, this text of scripture (2 Corinthians 13:14) is the only place in Paul’s writings where he mentions the Father, Son and Holy Spirit together as such in what we refer to as ‘one text’. I cannot remember where other than this he lists them together in such a manner. Yet Spangler said, “ *Paul usually places God the Father first*”, thus making it look as though he very often listed the three together. The fact is that there are very few places in the entire Scripture where all three are listed together as such in one text, let alone in Paul’s writings.

Spangler reasons that whichever of the three divine personalities had come to earth He would still have been called the Son of God. If this were true, the same would apply to the other two who took the roles of the Father and the Holy Spirit. They could have played the part of any of the three.

Before we move away from this point, it is very interesting that in the opening address of each of his letters, the apostle Paul, just as did the other New Testament writers - only says ‘from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ’. In other words, he does not say ‘from the Holy Spirit’.

Why therefore, if the Holy Spirit is a person exactly like God and Christ - did Paul and the other New Testament writers, all under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, omit Him from their introductions?

I did find one person who said that the three persons of the ‘trinity God’ are different. This is Jo Ann Davidson, Professor of theology at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary Andrews University. She said in an article in ‘Adventist World’ concerning the trinity

*“The three divine Persons are equal but not identical.” (Jo Ann Davidson Ph.D, Adventist World, March 2011, ‘God in three persons – Blessed Trinity’)*

To say they are different is not usual trinity theology. Unfortunately, Professor Davidson does not explain how they are different. I would find an explanation of this statement quite interesting – especially as she said in

the same article

*“God refers to Himself both as “He” and “Us”. In the Old Testament the plural form of one of the nouns for God (‘elohim’) is quantitative. “Let us make man in our image.”*

*(Jo Ann Davidson Ph. D, Adventist World, March 2011, ‘God in three persons – Blessed Trinity’)*

### **Repeated reasoning in Sabbath School Lesson Study**

Quite recently, in a Seventh-day Adventist Sabbath School Lesson Study, Spangler’s reasoning was repeated. This was the second quarter of 2008. The principal contributor was Roy Adams.

The study said

*“But imagine a situation in which the Being we have come to know as God the Father came to die for us, and the One we have come to know as Jesus stayed back in heaven (we are speaking in human terms to make a point).” (Seventh-day Adventist Sabbath School Quarterly, page 19, Thursday April 10<sup>th</sup> 2008, ‘The Mystery of His Deity)*

Here again we see the reasoning that the roles could have been switched. The lesson study concluded

*“Nothing would have changed, except that we would have been calling Each by the name we now use for the Other.” (Ibid)*

In principle, this is exactly the same as was said by Holbrook, Jenson and Spangler (see above) – meaning that no matter which one of the three personalities had become flesh, He still would have been termed the Son of God. This is only the same as saying that in reality there is no real Father, no real Son and no real Holy Spirit.

The study added

*“That is what equality in the Deity means.” (Ibid)*

This is Seventh-day Adventist trinitarian reasoning. Needless to say, not everyone would agree with it but it does appear to be current Seventh-day Adventist theology. This is because it is now being taught in our current Sabbath School lesson studies (2008). Can you remember discussing this in your Sabbath School class? Did you agree with what was being said?

### **Only a son because of the incarnation**

Some have added another dimension to this ‘triune role-playing’ theology. This is that Christ is only referred to as a son because of the incarnation.

In June 1982, a very well known evangelist in Seventh-day Adventism – namely J. R. Hoffman - submitted this type of reasoning to the readers of the ‘Ministry’ magazine. This is a magazine dedicated not only to the Seventh-day Adventist ministry but also many thousands of ministers not of our faith. In fact according to the 'Ministry' website, “**Approximately 62,000 pastors of other denominations** receive the journal bi-monthly on a gift subscription basis.” Obviously this magazine tells the rest of the Christian world what Seventh-day Adventists believe.



In an article called 'Is Jesus Jehovah God', Hoffman presented the view that Christ is called a son only because of the events of Bethlehem. He wrote saying

*"The Father, Son relationship in the New Testament, must always be understood in the light of the event of Bethlehem. The only child born into this world with a divine rather than a human father is Jesus. The title 'son' refers to His entry into time and does not deny at all His eternal origins. There are references in the Old Testament to 'Sonship' but these are always in anticipation of the incarnation." (J. R. Hoffman, Seventh-day Adventist Minister, Ministry Magazine article 'Is Jesus Jehovah God?' June 1982 page 24)*

The emphasis here is that the 'Father-Son' relationship has no application to Christ's pre-existence. In other words, it has nothing to do with Christ's divine relationship with God. Rather, Hoffman says, it is a terminology only made applicable by the events of the incarnation. This would mean that Christ is only called a son because of what happened 2000 years ago at Bethlehem.

Hoffman later went on to say

*"John 3:16 clearly states that the Son was "begotten" (K.J.V.). This is the same word used to convey the idea of giving birth or existence." (Ibid)*

He then said

*"This unfortunate translation of the word monogenes is one that no modern translation of the Bible has perpetuated. Monogenes means "unique, one of a kind." "To be only begotten" would call for using a different Greek word." (Ibid)*

Unfortunately for us, Hoffman does not say what this "different Greek word" would be, so we cannot check it out.

During the 1980's, in a sermon he presented when conducting a series of evangelistic meetings, Hoffman reiterated this very same thought. This sermon was recorded on a cassette tape. Like his 'Ministry' article, this tape (acquired through the ABC) is also called 'Is Jesus Jehovah God?'

In this sermon Hoffman says that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have eternally co-existed together. He also says

*"The Scriptures teaches and the Christian faith sustains, that there were three persons in heaven and that by the decision of the holy trinity, the second person of the Godhead, elected by His own choice (He was not drafted, Paul said He volunteered), he came down into this world and was born in the womb of the blessed virgin at Bethlehem. The only person who was born into this world without an earthly father, is our Lord Jesus Christ" (J. R. Hoffman, ABC Cassette tape, 'Is Jesus Jehovah God?')*

Note first of all the avoidance of the word 'son'. Hoffman just says "second person of the Godhead". He then asks his listeners if they are ready for a conclusion. He follows this by saying

*"The second person is the Son of the first person only because of what happened in Bethlehem. The second person is the Son of the first person only*

*because of what happened here in this world.” (Ibid)*

He then adds concerning Christ

*“Only person born without an earthly father. He was a child of the Heavenly Father. This applies to his earthly nature, but it has no context whatsoever with His eternal nature.” (Ibid)*

Hoffman concludes

*“In His eternal nature, the second person was not the child of the first person. He is the child of the first person only because of what happened at Bethlehem.” (Ibid)*

He then asks his listeners

*“How many understand what I am saying here?” (Ibid)*

I would think that most would understand what Hoffman was saying although not everyone would agree with him, especially those who believe what the Scriptures say – also what we have been told through the spirit of prophecy. This is that Christ is truly the Son of God – begotten of the Father in eternity.

Hoffman is denying this to be true. He is saying that Christ is not begotten of the Father therefore prior to the incarnation He was not a son. He says that Christ’s Sonship only came about because of the events of Bethlehem (the incarnation). This is obviously a form of adoptionism – which in its various forms was rejected by the early Christian church as heresy. The early church believed that Christ was truly the Son of God – meaning a Son in His pre-existence. It is obvious too, seeing that he says the Son was not really a son (at least in His pre-existence) that Hoffman is advocating this role-playing idea.

## **Straw men raised in new book ‘Trinity’**

Nine years ago in 2002, the Seventh-day Adventist Church published a book called ‘The Trinity’. It was co-authored by Woodrow Whidden, Jerry Moon and John Reeve. This book says much the same as Jenson, Holbrook, Spangler and Hoffman. This is that the Father/Son relationship is only metaphorical (figurative) and not one that is real. In other words, the Father and Son were not really a father and son but were simply acting out these roles.

This book was published with the intent of justifying our current denominational theology (see page 7 ‘Introduction’). It is also said to have been published because of the rise of non-trinitarianism within our church, also to answer the objections of the non-trinitarians to the trinity doctrine. Whether it actually did this is entirely the prerogative of the reader of this book to decide. For my part I have read it through on countless number of occasions but it certainly does not answer – or even address – some of the objections that I have to this three-in-one teaching.

Speaking of the texts of Scripture which are ‘problem texts’ (this must mean to the trinitarians because they certainly do not cause problems to the non-trinitarians) Whidden says

*“Is it not quite apparent that the problem texts become problems only when one assumes an exclusively literalistic interpretation of such expressions as “Father,” “Son,” “Firstborn,” “Only Begotten,” “Begotten,” and so forth?  
(Woodrow Whidden, The Trinity, ‘Biblical objections to the trinity’ page 106, 2002)*

In other words says Whidden, the designations of ‘Father’, ‘Son’ and ‘begotten’ etc only cause problems when they are taken literally. The question must be asked though, why shouldn’t they be taken literally? What reason could we offer?

These terminologies are only a ‘problem’ to the trinitarians amongst us. This is because if they are taken to be literal (real), this would make null and void the Seventh-day Adventist version of the trinity doctrine – also many of its associated teachings. This is why in order to eliminate this problem, the Seventh-day Adventist trinitarians say that these descriptions should only be accepted as metaphorical or figurative etc (not real). This is also why they resort to teaching a ‘role-playing’ Godhead.

Whidden then says

*“Does not such literalism go against the mainly figurative or metaphorical meaning that the Bible writers use when referring to the persons of the Godhead? Can one really say that the Bible writers meant such expressions as “the only true God” and “one God the Father” to exclude the full deity of the Son, Christ Jesus?” (Ibid)*

Here is where a straw man is set up. The implied allegation is that if it is said that the Father is really a father – also that the Son is really a son, meaning that in eternity Christ was begotten of the Father, then this denies “the full deity” of the one who is called a son – or perhaps better said (according to present Seventh-day Adventist theology), it denies the full deity of the one pretending to be (role-playing) a son.

This is very much a straw man because in the reasoning of the past and present non-trinitarians, the belief that Christ is begotten of God actually makes Him God in the person of the Son. We have already seen in this study that this is what God Himself has revealed - not only through the Scriptures but also through the spirit of prophecy.

In fact in an 1892 tract devoted to explaining to the public our Godhead beliefs it was said

*“The same Bible as clearly teaches that the adorable Person therein known as Jesus Christ, when considered in his whole nature, is truly divine and truly God in the most absolute sense. John 1:1-18; 1 John 5:20; Rom. 1:3, 4; 9:5; Titus 2:13.” (Rev. Samuel T. Spear D. D., New York Independent, ‘The Subordination of Christ’, later published by the Seventh-day Adventist pacific Press as ‘The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity’ and included as No. 90 in ‘The Bible Student’s Library’, 1892)*

Notice this was in 1892. We were still then believers in the literal Sonship of Christ – non-trinitarians.

We shall that the next year (1893), by saying that the Seventh-day Adventist Church was teaching the truth concerning the pre- existence of Christ, Ellen White did actually endorse this begotten belief. How much more of an endorsement should be needed by Seventh-day Adventists? It was this belief that at this time (1893) was the denominational belief of Seventh-day Adventists. This same belief continued for decades after the death of Ellen White (1915).

We shall also see that although the early Seventh-day Adventists rejected the trinity doctrine as unscriptural, they certainly upheld the belief that Christ was fully and completely divine. In order to depict the divinity of Christ correctly, the trinity doctrine is not required. All that needs to be done is to present it as it is depicted in the Bible – which is totally silent as to God being a trinity.

Whidden also concluded

*“Furthermore, what proves to be quite ironic is that some of the most compelling evidence for the equality of the Father and the Son occurs in contexts that employ the very metaphors of “Father” and “Son” (especially John 5:16-23).” (Ibid, page 106 and 107)*

Notice Whidden’s reference to “John 5:16-23” . Here he is saying that when Jesus used the terms ‘Father’ and ‘Son’, He only meant them to be accepted in a metaphorical or figurative sense.

Take note concerning His identity, of the dispute that Jesus had with the Jews (as recorded in John chapter 5). It was because Jesus claimed to be the Son of God that the Jews said He was making Himself equal with God (John 5:18). They did not see this as a metaphor. They took this to be literal. When reasoned through, for what should this be a metaphor?

Here we must take into consideration something very important.

Whidden says that it was the Bible writers who employed these terms ‘Father’ and ‘Son’. This overlooks one very important point. This is that when John wrote of the conversation that Jesus had with Nicodemus, also of the conversation that Jesus had with the blind man etc (see John 3:16-17 and John 9:35-38), he was recording what was actually said by Jesus. In other words, John (the Bible writer) was not the one who decided to use the terminology ‘Son’ but Jesus. This is the same as when Jesus called God His Father. The Bible writers were recording His words. The same can also be said when God Himself said that He was the Father of Christ (see Matthew 3:17, 17:5). Matthew was recording the words actually spoken by God. This means it was not the Bible writers who decided to use these terminologies (Father and Son) but the Father and the Son themselves. This also means that if as Whidden says these words were only metaphors, the responsibility for their usage cannot be put on the Bible writers but upon God and Christ.

It is possible that those who promote the idea that the terms ‘Father’ and ‘Son’ are only metaphors will say that we do not really know what the exact words were that God and Christ spoke. If this is said, then without me explaining it in any detail, we, as believers in the inspiration of the Scriptures, have a very serious problem. Our entire faith is built upon what has actually been said by God and Christ.

Whidden had previously said

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

If the terms ‘Father’ and ‘Son’ are only “imagery” for showing the intimacy that has always existed “between the first and second persons of the Godhead”, then what about the intimacy that exists between the persons who are role-playing the Father and the Holy Spirit – also between the ‘Holy Spirit’ and the ‘Son’ – how is this explained? We must also ask, what is the metaphor or imagery of the ‘Holy Spirit’ supposed to depict (assuming it is a metaphor)? Again some of the responsibility for this imagery (if it was imagery) must be placed upon God and Christ – and when it is reasoned through – even when the Bible writers themselves used these designations (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) it was the Holy Spirit who put these thoughts into their minds (2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:20). This means that some of the ‘blame’ for the use of these metaphors is apportioned to the Holy Spirit.

It can only be said that if the terms ‘Father’ and ‘Son’ are only meant to convey to humanity the intimacy

that exists between two of the three persons of the Godhead (who are not really a father and a son) then this has been the cause of unnecessary confusion. Why use “metaphors” and “imagery” ? Why not say who and what they really are – also how much they love each other? Why confuse the issue by saying things that are not true? Is God the author of confusion?

In Whidden’s statement we also see repeated the straw man scenario.

Whidden is saying that if Christ is said to be begotten of God, then this makes Him “some sort of derived or created semigod” . As we have seen so far in this study though, this is far from being the truth. The early Seventh-day Adventists who believed that Christ was begotten of the Father did actually believe that *because* He was begotten of God, He is God Himself in the person of the Son. How this is making Christ a “created semigod” I fail to understand. Obviously, regarding this issue, the present trinitarians are seriously misrepresenting the non-trinitarians. In fact this allegation can rightly be termed a falsehood. Certainly it is not the truth.

Look at these other statements from the book. They all say much the same thing.

*“Furthermore, other anti-Trinitarians also want to make essentially the same point – that Jesus is not merely a human being, but some sort of semi – or demigod who in some sense derived His divine nature from the Father somewhere in the dimly comprehended ages of eternity past. Such concepts about Jesus reflect the classic thinking of Arianism.” (Woodrow Whidden, ‘The Trinity’, page 59, ‘The full and eternal deity of Christ – part II’, 2002)*

On page 94 he said in similar fashion

*“Another important consideration involves how we interpret the Bible. Here the issue pertains to whether we should interpret some passages literally or whether we may treat them more figuratively . Maybe we could illustrate it this way. While we often refer to Jesus as the Son and frequently call the first person of the Godhead the Father, do we really want to take such expressions in a totally literal way? Or would it be more appropriate to interpret them in a more metaphorical way that draws on selective aspects of sonship and fatherhood?” (Woodrow Whidden, The Trinity, Biblical objections to the trinity, page 94)*

On the same page it is said

*“As noted above, the gist of the anti-Trinitarian interpretation of this text claims that God the Father has literally generated, or “begat,” a divine being (the Son) sometime in the ages of eternity past as some sort of semidivine person. The Arians teach that it was an act of direct creation. The semi-Arians suggest that Jesus sort of split off from the nature of the Father to form a separate divine person. Thus both groups consider Jesus, the Son, to be an inferior “god,” not a true and eternally preexisting being such as the Father”” (Ibid)*

Whidden also said (after asking “what are we to make of the fact that God calls Christ “My Son,” “begotten” by God, and the “firstborn”?”)

*“The anti-Trinitarians are quick to give these terms a very literal interpretation in the sense that Christ is a ‘truly’ “begotten, firstborn Son” generated by the*



*Father. Thus they conclude that Christ is a “god” of lesser deity and dignity than the eternal Father.” (Ibid 101)*

Here again we see the repeated setting up of the same straw man. This is because the non-trinitarians amongst us, at least the ones whom I know personally, believe as I do that Christ is God – albeit God in the person of the Son. They certainly do not regard Him as some sort of 'lesser god' – not even 'a god'. They say He is God – in the person of the Son.

The same straw man reasoning was made by Gerhard Pfandl, Associate Director of the Seventh-day Adventist Biblical Research Institute. He wrote in an article concerning the trinity and our Godhead history

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

Pfandl is correct in saying that “*during the first decades* of this century *there were many*” Seventh-day Adventists who believed that Christ is truly begotten of the Father (truly God's Son) – which is what he is actually saying – but he is wrong in his belief that this same concept makes Christ “*inferior*” to the Father. In fact the very opposite is true. Those who believe that Christ is begotten of the Father (truly God's Son) believe that Christ is equal to the Father because He is God in the person of the Son.

What needs to be established is whether of not the Scriptures do actually say that Christ is begotten (brought forth) of God – and that because of this He is truly a son. If this is what the Bible does say then we must accept whatever this conveys. What we must not do, simply because we do not like what this begotten concept conveys, is to say that Christ is not begotten. What right do we have to do such a thing? This would be tantamount to changing what the Bible says just to suit our own ideology (or theology).

As the Rev Samuel Spear once wrote concerning the three personalities of the Godhead (particularly concerning the divinity of Christ)

*“All the statements of the Bible must be accepted as true, with whatever qualifications they mutually impose on one another .” (Samuel Spear, The Subordination of Christ, Later published by the pacific Press as ‘The Bible Doctrine of the Trinity’ and included as No. 90 in ‘The Bible Student’s Library’, 1892)*

He then added

*“The whole truth lies in them all when taken collectively” (Ibid)*

This is the view taken by the author of this study – which is that we must study all that the Scriptures say on any particular study and then, by way of conclusion, weigh up what we find. We must not just use certain texts of Scripture to so say ‘prove’ our point and ignore Scripture that say differently. This is not an honest way to study anything, let alone the Scriptures. It is only when we weigh up what the Bible says “*collectively*” that we can get an honest picture of any subject matter.

Whidden is saying that our past Seventh- day Adventists who believed that Christ is literally begotten of God (meaning He is truly the Son of God) were in fact depicting Him as “*some sort of derived or created semigod*” – “a “*god*” of lesser deity and dignity than the eternal Father”. As we have seen though this is a complete misrepresentation of the faith and beliefs of early Seventh- day Adventists. It would be so good if our

present theologians and historians could correctly portray the faith of their earlier brethren. What a blessing this would be – particularly to those Seventh-day Adventists who unfortunately are taking the word of our current leadership for what they believe.

It would also be good, even Christ- like, if the present trinitarians amongst us do not misrepresent the current Seventh-day Adventist non-trinitarians (meaning those who share the beliefs of the author of this study). Needless to say, the latter do not regard Christ as “a “god” of lesser deity and dignity than the eternal Father” – neither do they regard Him as “some sort of derived or created semigod”. These non-trinitarians say that Christ is equal to the Father – God Himself in the person of the Son. This is exactly the same as was believed by the early Seventh-day Adventists – i. e. those who lived during the time of Ellen White’s ministry and who believed that Christ is truly the Son of God.

Whidden also said

***“Obviously, what is in mind here is not Christ being generated by the Father as a divine being, at best a diminished or semideity. Rather, the writer is presenting Christ as being “begotten” as the “firstborn Son” of God in the Incarnation.” (Woodrow Whidden, The Trinity, ‘Biblical objections to the trinity’ page 101, 2002)***

Here we come back to the thought that Christ is only said to be begotten because He became human – also to the straw man of saying that those who believe Christ to be truly the Son of God (begotten of God in eternity) are saying He is “at best a diminished or semideity” . As Whidden also said

***“In the literary context of Hebrews 1, Christ is a Son of God in the sense that He, who is the eternal, fully divine Son , has become “begotten” as the “firstborn” in the flesh of humanity so that He might have the redemptive preeminence over the “angels” who worship Him.” (Ibid)***

Whidden again refers to the pre-existent Christ (for some reason) as “the eternal, fully divine Son” – yet still maintains that the word ‘begotten’ only refers to His human status.

He also says

***“It is obvious that “begotten” in Hebrews 1:5 r efers to Christ's appointment by the Father to the office of high priest of the heavenly sanctuary . Once more the context strongly suggests that Scripture is not using “begotten” in any sense of the Father God generating a Son who is a lesser God, but with the connotation of Christ being made the divine/human high priest.” (Ibid page 102)***

From what is said here by Whidden, it does appear that his main purpose is to demean (belittle) the faith of past and present non-trinitarians who say, in accordance with Scripture, that because Christ is begotten of the Father He is God Himself in the person of the Son. The latter is not a demeaning of Christ but a setting Him forth in His true position as God's own Son.

On the next page the comment is made

***“In other words, Scripture terms Jesus as “begotten Son” in the sense of His incarnate humanity and His intimate, dependant relationship to His Father during this period of His human vulnerability.” (Ibid page 103)***

In other words again, Christ is only referred to as a “begotten Son” because of the incarnation.

He had said previously (this was with respect to

*“Furthermore, other anti-Trinitarians also want to make essentially the same point – that Jesus is not merely a human being, but some sort of semi – or demigod who in some sense derived His divine nature from the Father somewhere in the dimly comprehended ages of eternity past. Such concepts about Jesus reflect the classic thinking of Arianism.” (Woodrow Whidden, ‘The Trinity’, page 59, ‘The full and eternal deity of Christ – part II’, 2002)*

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*“Another important consideration involves how we interpret the Bible. Here the issue pertains to whether we should interpret some passages literally or whether we may treat them more figuratively . Maybe we could illustrate it this way. While we often refer to Jesus as the Son and frequently call the first person of the Godhead the Father, do we really want to take such expressions in a totally literal way? Or would it be more appropriate to interpret them in a more metaphorical way that draws on selective aspects of sonship and fatherhood?” (Woodrow Whidden, The Trinity, Biblical objections to the trinity, page 94)*

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## **A very serious implication-insinuating John 3:16 is not what it says**

Under the heading of “Apparent Contradictions”, it said in our Sabbath School lesson quarterly for the second quarter of 2008 (this is the same study where we noted above it was said that no matter which of the three persons who came He would still be called the Son of God)

*“Notwithstanding the clearest statements about Jesus’ deity and equality with God the Father, we still encounter passages that call for explanation. One example occurs in what is undoubtedly the most beloved and well-known text in all the Bible, John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son.” The problem is, How can the text say Jesus was “begotten” if He was eternal? Did someone beget Him, just like the rest of us?*

*The expression “only begotten” is one word in the Greek language: monogenes, occurring nine times in the New Testament, with five of those references applying to Jesus and all five in the writings of John (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9) (Seventh-day Adventist Standard Sabbath School Quarterly, page 17, Tuesday April 8<sup>th</sup> 2008, ‘The Mystery of His Deity’)[Apparent Contradictions]*

The study then says

***“It is significant that all five references occur in the writings of the very author who from the start of his Gospel seeks to establish the deity of Jesus Christ. Indeed, he commences precisely on that point: “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1).”***

In His gospel, John did establish the deity of Christ but it was also to show that a divine person had truly become flesh (truly human) – also that this personage was none other than the divine Son of God (see John 20:30-31). This was in opposition to many (like the Docetae) who at the time of him writing his gospel said that Jesus only ‘appeared’ to be human. It was also written in opposition to those (like Cerinthus) who were saying Christ was not really divine. As John wrote

***“And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.” John 20:30-31***

Notice that John did not say he had written his gospel to show that Jesus was God – or to say that He was divine or to show that He was ‘God the Son’ (as say the trinitarians) – but that he had written it so that we “might believe that Jesus is the Christ, *the Son of God*”.

The above lesson study then leads its readers to conclude

***“It would have been incredible that this Jewish writer would have attributed the title of Deity to someone he considered a created being.” (Seventh-day Adventist Standard Sabbath School Quarterly, page 17, Tuesday April 8<sup>th</sup> 2008, ‘The Mystery of His Deity’)***

If this is implying that the begotten concept leads to the belief that Christ is a created being then this is one huge misrepresentation of what is believed by those who accept (and those who in the past have accepted) that Christ is truly the Son of God - meaning in eternity Christ was begotten of the Father. They do not believe that Christ is a created being. They believe He is God Himself in the person of the Son.

The study for that day concluded

***“The weight of scholarly opinion favors the view that monogenes, linguistically, does not place emphasis on begetting or begotten, but rather on the oneness of a kind, on the idea of uniqueness. How does this idea, too, help us better understand the great sacrifice made for us at the Cross?” (Ibid)***

Again we return to the thought of 'monogenes' only meaning 'unique'.

Even as early as 1869, J. G. Matteson wrote (this typifies what was the denominational belief of early Seventh-day Adventists)

***“Christ is the only literal Son of God. “The only begotten of the Father.” John 1, 14.” (J. G. Matteson, Review and Herald, October 12<sup>th</sup> 1869, ‘Children of God’)***

He then added

***“He is God because he is the Son of God; not by virtue of his resurrection.”  
(Ibid)***

This was the standard belief in Seventh-day Adventism. This was the faith endorsed by Ellen White. It was because Christ is begotten of God He is God – meaning also He is truly the Son of God.

## **Why was Jesus chosen to be the Savior?**

In the March 2011 edition of the ‘Signs of the Times’, an article was published called “Why was it Jesus?” It was written by Steve Case. After quoting John 3:16 which says “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son” etc he wrote

***“Did you catch the first part? The fact that Jesus came to earth is built on the foundation of God the Father’s love for us!” (Steve Case, Signs of the Times, March 2011, ‘Why was it Jesus?’)***

This sounds to be in keeping with what the Scriptures say (John 3:16 etc) and what we have seen has been revealed through the spirit of prophecy. As we shall now see though, this becomes confusing because Case says that

***“While God the Father didn’t have a baby Boy named God the Son, we use these terms to help us understand that the parts of the Godhead are separate yet closely linked, the way a father and son bond together.” (Ibid)***

Again we return to the role- playing idea – therefore how can it be said that the fact that Jesus came to earth “is built on the foundation of God the Father’s love”? If there is no real Father, then to whom is Case referring? It could be to any of the three. Any of them could have chosen to role-play the Father.

No one who believes that Christ is begotten of God actually believes that God had a “baby Boy” but note this means that if ‘the Son’ is not really a son, then ‘the Father’ is not really a father. Why then does Case say (see above) “ The fact that Jesus came to earth is built on *the foundation of God the Father’s love for us*”? If all three are exactly the same – and there is no real father, no real son, no real holy spirit - why attribute Christ’s coming to earth as being the result of “the Father’s love for us” (or better said, the divine person role-playing the part of the Father)? This does not make sense. Why not say it was because of the Holy Spirit’s love or the Son’s love – or the trinity’s love? The whole matter becomes totally confusing. In fact as we shall see later, Case says the coming of Christ to earth it was a ‘trinity decision’.

Note Case says too that the terms ‘Father’ and ‘Son are used only to denote the “*the parts of the Godhead are separate yet closely linked*”. Here these two divine personages of the Father and the Son are called “parts”. Case also said that these “parts” are “separate”. What he means by this he does not explain but it does appear to be in opposition to the current theology of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Our official belief today, as is stated here by Ekkehardt Mueller, Associate Director of the Seventh-day Adventist Biblical Research Institute, is that

***“... each person of the Godhead is inseparably connected to the other two”  
(Ekkehardt Mueller, Biblical Research Institute, Reflections newsletter, July 2008, Page 8, ‘Scripture Applied, - A Bible Study’).***

This is what makes any Godhead belief trinitarian. If this was not said then it would not be a trinity belief.

Notice too that in quoting John 3:16 and saying “*we use* these terms (Father and Son) to help us understand that the parts of the Godhead are separate yet closely linked, the way a father and son bond together”, Case



seems to be overlooking the fact that John was recording the words that Jesus actually spoke to His listeners. In other words, it was not “we” who decided to use these terms but Christ Himself and the Father (see Matthew 3:17, 17:5, John 3:16, 9:35-37 etc).

Case later admitted

*“I don’t know of a specific verse in the Bible that explains how Jesus was the Member of the Trinity that was chosen to come to earth to live and die. What I do find is that all Three Members of the Godhead have been involved all along.” (Ibid)*

He also said

*“I don’t know how the Trinity decided that it would be Jesus who would come to earth, but I do know that all Three Members of the Godhead have been involved in our salvation from the beginning to the end!” (Ibid)*

The reason why Case does not know of a verse that says or explains these things is because there isn’t one. This again is the role-playing idea. As we also noted above, for some reason Case said that Christ coming to earth “is built on the foundation of **God the Father’s love** for us” – which does sound somewhat confusing – seeing that any one of them could have been ‘the Father’ (if the role-playing idea is true). It is also confusing because Case is saying here that it was a ‘trinity’ decision and not just the decision of one person.

We saw that in the book ‘Seventh-day Adventists Believe’ it said

*“The Father seems to act as source, the Son as mediator, and the Spirit as actualizer or applier.” (Seventh-day Adventists Believe, page 30, 2005, ‘The Godhead’)*

It also said on the same page

*“In the godhead, final authority resides in all three members.” (Ibid)*

This means that the reason why Christ came to earth cannot be traced back to one person’s love (such as the Father) but to the love of all three. In our Sabbath School quarterly for the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 1998 it said

*“Entirely through Their own initiative, the Godhead arranged for One among Them to become a human being . They did so in order to (1) provide us with our Substitute and Surety, (2) make God's ways plain, (3) restore us to our pre-sin perfection, and (4) settle the debate about God's justice.” (Sabbath School Quarterly, 4<sup>th</sup> quarter 1998, page 30, ‘Immanuel, God with us’)*

On page 36 it said

*“At precisely the right time and in the right way, the three Members of the Godhead put into operation a plan They had devised before the world was created. They surrendered a portion of Themselves—the Divine Son—to become the Saviour of the world.” (See Gal. 4:4; 1 Pet. 1:18-21.)*

Through the spirit of prophecy though, when saying that the restoration of man from his fallen state began in the courts of Heaven, Ellen White wrote

*“There God decided to give human beings an unmistakable evidence of the love with which He regarded them. He "so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (Ellen G. White, Australian Union Conference Record, 1<sup>st</sup> April 1901, ‘An important letter’)*

Here we are told that the ‘giving’ was done by a person (singular) – namely God the Father (“God decided”). He gave His Son. The following words then followed

*“The Godhead was stirred with pity for the race, and the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit gave themselves to the working out of the plan of redemption. In order to fully carry out this plan, it was decided that Christ, the only begotten Son of God, should give Himself an offering for sin. What line can measure the depth of this love?” (Ibid)*

If the previous paragraph was ignored (omitted), it could be reasoned that the Godhead chose to send the Son but this is not what is being said here. Whilst it does say the Godhead was stirred and gave themselves to the saving of mankind, the previous paragraph said it was God who “decided” to send His only begotten Son. This must mean ‘the Father’. It was not the Godhead that had a son to give but the Father. Here again, in this decision making, is seen the pre-eminence of the Father.

As Ellen White went on to say

*“God would make it impossible for man to say that He could have done more. With Christ He gave all the resources of heaven, that nothing might be wanting in the plan for man's uplifting.” (Ibid)*

Notice here who was doing the giving. It was God the Father. It was He who gave His Son – His only son.

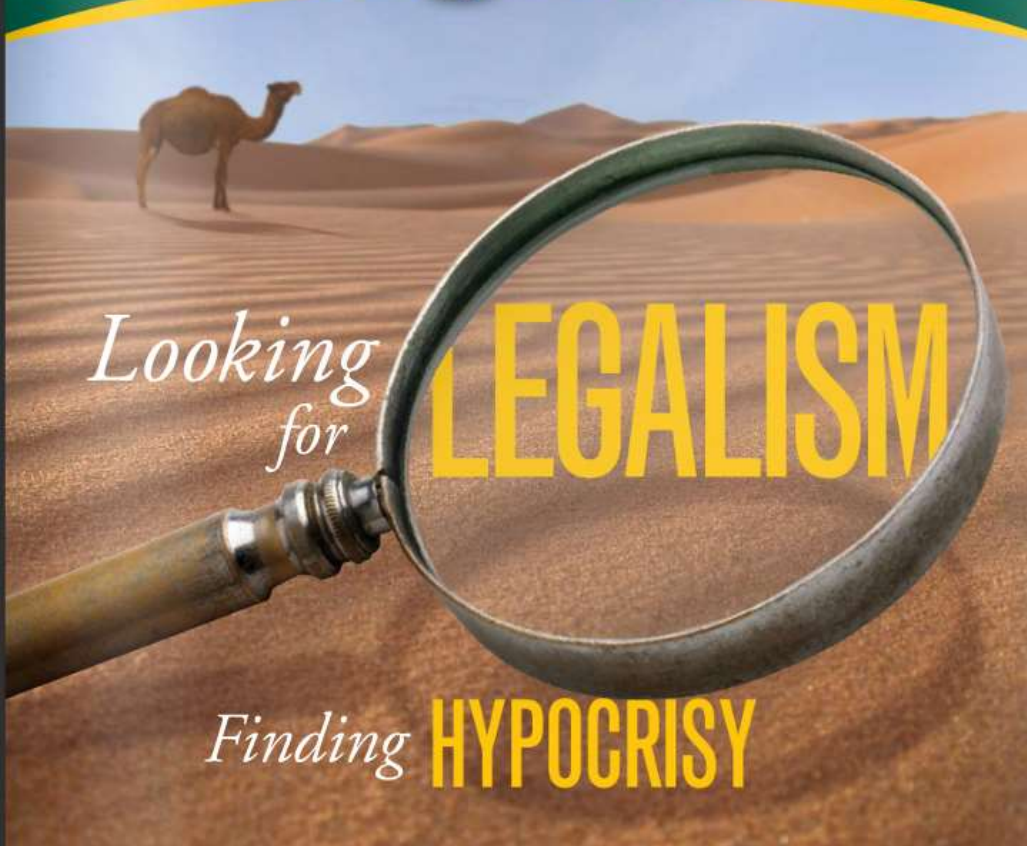
*“Those who engage in the work of God's cause today will meet just such trials as Paul endured in his work. By the same boastful and deceptive work Satan will seek to draw converts from the faith. Theories will be brought in that will not be wise for us to handle. Satan is a cunning worker, and he will bring in subtle fallacies to darken and confuse the mind and root out the doctrines of salvation. Those who do not accept the Word of God just as it reads, will be snared in his trap. Today we need to speak the truth with holy boldness. The testimony borne to the early church by the Lord's messenger, His people are to hear in this time: "Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:8).” (Ellen G. White, Manuscript 43, 1907, 'Exhortation to faithfulness to church members and elders)*

**November 2015 Adventist World article by Ange Manuel Rodriquez on role playing of the Godhead**

*The International Paper for Seventh-day Adventists*

November 2015

# ADVENTIST WORLD

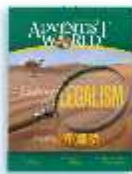


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Grace Unending

**M**y quest for sinlessness didn't even survive the day of my baptism. I had risen from the watery grave, glowing with joy because I had given my life to Jesus. After two long series of Bible studies, I had joined five classmates for a Sabbath afternoon service that filled my 12-year-old heart with joy. Family, friends, and classmates crowded around, affirming the decision I had made and the life to which I was now committed.

But no mortal with brothers ever got far down the road to sinless perfection.

Later that afternoon, while our family was walking at a nature sanctuary, I had fallen into a familiar argument with one of my brothers—about schoolwork; about who was doing more of the household chores—some forgettable topic not worth the disagreement.

And with a sickening feeling in my stomach, I realized that I had just failed in my quest to be perfect. Less than three hours had elapsed since I had promised my life to Jesus, and I was already conscience-stricken for losing my temper.

My story is familiar to millions of Christians and Adventists who remember the time of their baptism. Naively, we hoped—perhaps even believed—that we might never sin again, that Christ's forgiveness for our pasts might not be needed in our futures. But no later than the day after we gave our lives to Jesus, we discovered afresh how much we needed His grace and mercy. This was when we actually began to live the life of discipleship—not in those fleeting hours when we made no conscious mistakes—but in those days and months and years when our brokenness was graciously mended and restored by Jesus.

Around the Adventist world, more than 3,500 persons are being baptized every day. Come alongside them; hold them; affirm their good decision. Then help them realize—with you—that we will never outlive our need for grace, nor will we ever be saved by anything other than the righteousness of Christ.



*Bill Kinn*

Heavenly beings are sons of God through creation; the people of God are God's children through creation and redemption; and the king becomes a son of God through his appointment as king.

The significance of this title of Christ has been a matter of serious debate among Christians. The most basic understanding is that the incarnated Lord was born of the virgin Mary to be called the Son of God (Luke 1:32; 1 John 5:18). In sharing my understanding of the topic, I hope to motivate your continued study.

1. **Son(s) of God:** In the Old Testament the phrase "son(s)/children of God" designates three types of persons. The *heavenly beings* who met with the Lord in the divine council are called "the angels" (Heb., "sons of God," Job 1:6; 2:1).<sup>1</sup> At the moment of creation we are told that "all the angels [Heb., "sons of God"] shouted for joy" (Job 38:7). The *people of God* are called "the children of the Lord your God" (Dent. 14:1; see also Hosea 2:1; Isa. 45:11). They became God's children through creation and redemption (Ex. 4:22, 23). Finally, the *Israelite king* was called the "Son of God" (e.g., 2 Sam. 7:14). God appointed the king as "my firstborn" (Ps. 89:27; cf. Ps. 2:7). In these cases the word "son" is used figuratively. In the Bible God does not have children through natural conception and birth.

2. *Eternal Sonship of Christ:* Christ is the eternal Son of God. Paul wrote that "when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman" (Gal. 4:4). Christ was the Son of God before He was born of a woman. Through the preexistent Son, God "made the universe" (Heb. 1:2). However, the sonship of Christ is unique. Believers are spiritually born of God as children of God, but the Son is never described as being spiritually born of God; He is the Son, who came directly from the Father (John 16:28). He has life in Himself and is one with the Father in will (John 15:16; 16:15; 17:4-8), and nature (John 8:58). Yet He is a different person. We are dealing with a metaphorical use of the word "son."
  
3. *Metaphorical Significance:* In our humanity the image of a child conveys some obvious ideas. First, it indicates that a child is of the same nature as that of the parents; they are human beings. When Christ is called "Son of God," we are being told that He, like the Father, is a divine being (John 5:18). Second, a child is distinguishable from their parents. The metaphor of sonship means that although Christ and the Father have the same nature, they are different persons, implying a plurality of persons within the Godhead. Third, the relationship between parents and children is unique. Their union is practically indissoluble. The metaphor is therefore a good symbol for the deep unity that exists within the members of the Godhead (John 17:5). Fourth, a human child comes from its parents through natural birth. In the case of the Godhead, however, the Son proceeded from the Father, not as a divine emanation or through natural birth, but to perform a work of creation and redemption (John 8:42; 16:28). There is no biblical support for the eternal generation of the Son from the Father. The Son came from God but was not generated by Him. *Fifth*, 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. A natural child has a beginning, while within the Godhead the Son is eternal. The term "Son" is used metaphorically when applied to the Godhead. It conveys the ideas of distinction of persons within the Godhead and the equality of nature in the context of an eternal, loving relationship.

Ellen White wrote: "The Lord Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God, existed from eternity, a distinct person, yet one with the Father"<sup>2</sup> This statement summarizes the main purpose of the metaphor. ■

<sup>1</sup>*Texts. are from [Holy Bible, New International Version. Copyright© 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.*

<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958, 1980), book 1, p.247



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