

Andrews University  
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ELLEN WHITE AND SUBORDINATION WITHIN THE TRINITY

A Paper

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by

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## Introduction

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has been engaged in a debate about the role of women in ministry, especially as it pertains to ordination. While engaging in this debate, some have used the doctrine of the Trinity to support their understanding of the different roles in gender—specifically, the subordination of Jesus to the Father as evidence of a correlation with the subordination of women to men. The problem is that this is a case of *lex orandi, lex credendi*, which is to say that the way we practice our faith is shaping what we believe. In order to find support for the way some believe ministry should be practiced, they have turned to the writings of Ellen White. They have attempted to support a subordinationism within the Trinity with her writings. When one comes across a list of quotes, of Ellen White, compiled by someone who believes in a subordinationism within the Trinity, what does one do? Should the writings of Ellen White be used to prove this “new light”? Does she support such a claim?

## Background

Before getting into how one should use the writings of Ellen White and whether she supports subordinationism, one should first define the discussion. Wayne Grudem notes that the terminology that he uses to state his position on subordinationism of the Trinity is “eternal submission of the Son,” “eternal authority of the Father,” or “eternal subordination of the Son to the Father.”<sup>1</sup> He is basically refuting the claim by some that the submission of Jesus is only a temporary submission, when in fact it is an eternal submission.<sup>2</sup> Since the Trinity consists of a hierarchy with eternal subordination and can still be called equal, it can be concluded that sexual genders can have a hierarchy and still be equal. The position taken by Grudem has also been

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<sup>1</sup> Wayne Grudem, “Biblical Evidence for the Eternal Submission of the Son to the Father,” in *The New Evangelical Subordinationism? Perspectives on the Equality of God the Father and God the Son*, ed. Dennis W. Jowers and H. Wayne House (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012), 224.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 223–4.

called the Complementarian position, which means that the two sexes complement each other to complete humanity.<sup>3</sup> This position does not believe in an ontological subordinationism, but rather a functional one. Consequently, this allows them to not view themselves as embracing the ancient heresies of Arianism or subordinationism.

The other position, which is called equalitarianism, holds the view that the submission of the Son is only temporary. The submission of the Son is only because He was on a special mission to save humanity by becoming incarnate. The proponents of this view believe their argument best represents the Orthodox position.<sup>4</sup> Those who take this position believe that the subordinationism position represents a version of Arianism as stated by Giles.<sup>5</sup> D. Glenn Butner Jr. makes a claim that subordinationism is not so much a problem of Arianism, but tri-theism as it means that Jesus and the Father have two different wills.<sup>6</sup>

Due to the limited scope of this paper, the arguments for or the accusations against subordinationism will not be addressed biblically, theologically, or logically. There have already been analyses addressing this issue.<sup>7</sup> The purpose of this paper is to see if Ellen White supported subordinationism within the Trinity in her writings.

### **Ellen White Only Confirmed Doctrine**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has always taken the stand that the Bible is to be their only creed. Therefore, any doctrinal statements of the church need to come from the Bible

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<sup>3</sup> Kevin Giles, "Defining the Error Called Subordinationism," *EvQ* 87.3 (2015): 207.

<sup>4</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Who's Tampering with the Trinity? An Assessment of the Subordination Debate?*, (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009), 55, 80–1.

<sup>5</sup> Giles, "Defining the Error Called Subordinationism," 208, 220–4.

<sup>6</sup> D. Glenn Jr., "Eternal Functional Subordination and the Problem of the Divine Will," *JETS* 58.1 (2015): 132–8, 149.

<sup>7</sup> Erickson, *Who's Tampering with the Trinity?*; Matthew L. Tinkham Jr., "Neo-Subordinationism: The Alien Argumentation in the Gender Debate," *AUSS* 55.2 (2017): 237–90.

alone.<sup>8</sup> All of the key doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist church were accepted by Bible study first. Ellen White's visions were thus used only to confirm and clarify the doctrines.<sup>9</sup> In fact, Ellen White herself testified when studying out the doctrines that "during this whole time I could not understand the reasoning of the brethren. My mind was locked, as it were, and I could not comprehend the meaning of the scriptures we were studying. This was one of the greatest sorrows of my life."<sup>10</sup> Based on this testimony, she was not even able to contribute to the Bible studies that were formational for Seventh-day Adventist theology.

During these Bible studies, sometimes they would be stymied in their ability to progress forward. It was then that White says the following: "I would be taken off in vision, and a clear explanation of the passage we had been studying would be given me, with instruction as to how we were to labor and teach effectively. Thus, light was given that helped us understand the scriptures."<sup>11</sup> Therefore, it was only after thoroughly examining the Scriptures that the gift of prophecy would be given to help them progress in their Bible study. White was very clear about the purpose of her writings. She said,

The written testimonies are not to give new light, but to impress vividly upon the heart the truths of inspiration already revealed. Man's duty to God and to his fellow man has been distinctly specified in God's word; yet but few of you are obedient to the light given. Additional truth is not brought out; but God has through the *Testimonies* simplified the great truths already given and in His own chosen way brought them before the people to awaken and impress the mind with them, that all may be left without excuse.<sup>12</sup>

She clearly thought that her writings were not to be giving new light. They were only clarifying principles already contained in the Bible. That is why God only used her visions after

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<sup>8</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2010), 156.

<sup>9</sup> Denis Fortin, "Ellen White and the Development of Seventh-day Adventist Doctrines," in *Understanding Ellen White: The Life and Work of the Most Influential Voice in Adventist History*, ed. Merlin D. Burt (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2015), 109–13.

<sup>10</sup> Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958), 1:207.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 206–7.

<sup>12</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 2:605.

the Bible was thoroughly examined. He wanted the Seventh-day Adventist church to have its doctrines based solely on the Bible.

It would be very troubling, after leading the Seventh-day Adventists in finding their doctrinal positions directly from the Bible, to turn around and use Ellen White as the basis for doctrine. However, if she has been used to confirm the pioneers of the church in the past with their study, could she not have been used again in such a role later in her ministry?

### **Ellen White Confirmed Bible Study on the Doctrine of the Trinity**

Many of the early pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist church were Arian or Semi-Arian. Joseph Bates and James White carried this idea from their Christian Connexion past. This belief continued to be the dominate one until the General Conference of 1888.<sup>13</sup> After the conference, righteousness by faith started a new emphasis on the centrality of Christ to be used in Seventh-day Adventist presentations. W. W. Prescott took that challenge seriously. While in Australia, he started to study about who Jesus Christ is more fully. It is from these Bible studies that the doctrine of the Trinity had its start in being expressed more openly in the Seventh-day Adventist church. Just as before, Ellen White had a confirmatory role in establishing it as a doctrine.<sup>14</sup>

After White confirmed the Trinity doctrine, her writings took longer for official acceptance. The earliest statement about the Seventh-day Adventist belief in the Trinity occurred in 1913 as part of a summary list of beliefs, though it was not formally accepted then.<sup>15</sup> It was again listed as a belief in 1931 in the *SDA Year Book*.<sup>16</sup> Those beliefs in 1931 were officially

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<sup>13</sup> Jerry Moon, "The Adventist Trinity Debate, Part 1: Historical Overview," *AUSS* 41.1 (2003): 114.

<sup>14</sup> Gilbert M. Valentine, "Learning and Unlearning: A Context for Important Developments in the Seventh-day Adventist Understanding of the Trinity, 1888-1898," *AUSS* 55.2 (2017): 213–36.

<sup>15</sup> F. M. Wilcox, ed., "The Message for Today," *Review and Herald*, October 9, 1913, 21.

<sup>16</sup> Le Roy Edwin Froom, *Movement of Destiny* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1971), 413–14.

voted in the General Conference session of 1946.<sup>17</sup> Jerry Moon states that this is “the first official endorsement of a trinitarian view by the church.”<sup>18</sup> On that account, her writings confirmed the doctrine in the 1890s. However, not until 1946 was there an official acceptance of the Trinitarian view as voted by a General Conference session. The statement that was made in the 1980 General Conference session was just a revision of the 1946 statement.<sup>19</sup>

The *Desire of Ages* was the major piece of writing in confirming the doctrine of the Trinity. It is after the studies of W. W. Prescott that White wrote *The Desire of Ages*. That book is the key place where she made the first clear statements about the Trinity. There are no other previous places in her writings where the Trinity is totally denounced as being wrong. However, it was after serious Bible study that God used her again to confirm that in Jesus is “life, original, unborrowed, underived,” and that He is equal to the “I Am.”<sup>20</sup> Soon after this, she would pen that the Holy Spirit is the “third person of the Godhead.”<sup>21</sup> Thus was the beginning of the Trinity being explicitly taught by White. Again, it must be noted that it was only after thorough Bible study had been done that she then was used by God to confirm the doctrine.

This is important because, according to how White was used in the past in a confirmatory role, she was also used in this way with regard to the Trinity. This means that statements used before the 1890s would not be as clear as statements after then. Not that there were no statements about the Trinity, but they were not explicitly definitive. However, it should be clearly noted that her statements about the Trinity do not teach an openly Arian position (when that was the dominant teaching of the Seventh-day Adventist church at that time).<sup>22</sup> This is significant

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<sup>17</sup> “Fifteenth Meeting,” General Conference Report No. 8, *RH* (June 14 1946):197.

<sup>18</sup> Moon, “The Adventist Trinity Debate,” 122.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 122-5.

<sup>20</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1940), 24, 530.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 671.

<sup>22</sup> Moon, “The Adventist Trinity Debate,” 114.

because some try to use these more ambiguous statements to push their theological position on the Trinity. As it will be demonstrated, these earlier statements are ambiguous because the church had not thoroughly studied the meaning of the Trinity as a doctrine from the Bible.

### **Ellen White Grew in Her Understanding**

It has been demonstrated that Ellen White's writings were never used to give new light, nor were they used to establish doctrine. She was used to confirm and clarify what was already found in Scripture. She was also sometimes used to help get through a dead end. This would also mean that Ellen White herself would grow in her own understanding of Scripture.<sup>23</sup>

The idea of prophets growing in their understanding of divine revelation is not a new one. Moses grew in his understanding of administration as he faced challenges in leading Israel after leaving Egypt. Daniel himself did not even understand one of his own visions. Jonah was rebellious against a vision. Nathan needed to be corrected. Peter was rebuked by Paul, even after receiving the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Therefore, it should not be a big surprise that Ellen White also grew in her understanding of Scripture, theology, and mission even while receiving visions.

It is a fallacy that the older the vision, the more accurate it is. First, if that were true, why would she continue to receive visions and dreams all of her life?<sup>24</sup> If the early visions were the only ones that were needed, then why give new visions? Also, there were occasions when the first time the vision was given, it may have been misinterpreted or misunderstood.<sup>25</sup> This was what happened with a vision about the Sabbath. It was wrongly understood that the vision was teaching that the Sabbath should be kept from 6 p.m. on Friday to 6 p.m. on Saturday. After Bible study was done by J. N. Andrews, it was clearly shown that the Sabbath should be kept

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<sup>23</sup> Alberto R. Timm, "Humanity of the Prophets," in Burt, *Understanding Ellen White*, 98–100.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 101–3.

<sup>25</sup> Herbert Douglas, "Ellen White as God's Spokesperson," in Burt, *Understanding Ellen White*, 88–90.

from sundown to sundown. Everyone accepted the new position, except for two people—Joseph Bates and Ellen White. It was not until after three days that she received a vision confirming that the study of Andrews was correct. She and Joseph Bates were wrong in their understanding of the first vision. This wrong teaching of the time of the Sabbath was actually kept for about nine years.<sup>26</sup>

This clearly shows that it is an inadequate position to teach that the early writings of Ellen White are purer or that the early understanding of the Seventh-day Church is more correct. The church would be keeping the wrong time of the Sabbath if that were so. Therefore, we must compare all that Ellen White has to say on a subject and not just take her earliest statements as if they eclipse the later ones.<sup>27</sup> In view of this, it is actually better to read how a position developed in her writings in order to see if or how she corrected or clarified a doctrine.

Now when it comes to the doctrine of the Trinity, the same can be said. It is not her earliest statements that are the clearest. It is actually the later ones. This is because it was not until the 1890s where some of the scholars of the church were led to study out the Trinity.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, it will not be until the 1890s and later where Ellen White would have the clearest statements about the Trinity to confirm what had been clarified from further study. One must also be careful with the earlier statements, not because they are wrong, but because they are left obscure and thus can easily be misinterpreted with one's own theological position. One needs to look at the development of her statements on the Trinity to see her trajectory as she grows in understanding, as truth is revealed to her, and if she indeed points to a subordinationism view.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> George Knight, "How to Read Ellen White's Writings," in Burt *Understanding Ellen White*, 72–3.

<sup>28</sup> Valentine, "Learning and Unlearning," *AUSS* 55.2 (2017): 213–36.

## The Fall of Satan and Subordination

In Ellen White's description of the fall of Satan, one could possibly ascertain a subordinationism of the Trinity. This can be especially done in the first writing of that account found in *Spiritual Gifts*, which was first published in 1858.<sup>29</sup> There it shows that Satan was jealous of Jesus' role in creation. It also mentions that Satan was next to Jesus in honor and that he wanted to be the highest in heaven after the Father. Jesus was exalted and given unlimited power and command. When it was decided that the angels should be judged for their rebellion, it was to the Father that they were summoned.<sup>30</sup> The problem with this account is that it is brief and ambiguous. Because of its brevity and obscure nature, one can read into it the theology one already has. Thus, this passage can be "proof" for subordinationism, anti-Trinitarianism, or equalitarianism.

A more expanded version of the account is given in White's next account, found in the *Spirit of Prophecy*, which was published in 1870.<sup>31</sup> Again, this account shows that Satan was jealous of the Son. However, White added some important details into the account that made it more coherent. She states that "He was one with the Father before the angels were created."<sup>32</sup> She also mentions that the angels were to appear before the Father but this time she adds that "The Son was seated on the throne with the Father."<sup>33</sup> She continues that the Father made it clear that the Son was equal with the Father and that wherever the Son's presence was, it was the Father's presence also. The Son was to be in charge of the angels and the Father's will was to be carried out by the Son.<sup>34</sup> Thus, what she added to the account of the fall of Satan is the

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<sup>29</sup> "Ellen G. White Estate: Publications," <http://www.whiteestate.org/books/booklist.asp>.

<sup>30</sup> Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1945), 1:17-9.

<sup>31</sup> "Ellen G. White Estate: Publications," <http://www.whiteestate.org/books/booklist.asp>.

<sup>32</sup> Ellen G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1969), 1:17.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

mentioning of the equality of the Son with the Father, not a second-place status. Later, another additional piece was mentioned in the account that was not mentioned in *Spiritual Gifts*. This had to do with what the loyal angels said when they tried to reason with Satan:

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; and that he had given no commands but what it was joy for the heavenly host to execute. They urged that Christ's receiving special honor from the Father, in the presence of the angels, did not detract from the honor that he had heretofore received.<sup>35</sup>

The loyal angels, by saying this, made it clear that the Father was only stating what was always true. Some have suggested that the Son was given honor for the first time in the Father's decree, but the words from the angels make it clear that it was Satan who thought that the Son had only been recently exalted, instead of always being in that position.

The most expanded and clear statement on the fall of Lucifer can be found in White's *Patriarchs and Prophets*, first published in 1890.<sup>36</sup> It was again mentioned that it was envy of the Son that led to the fall of Satan. There was also mentioned the gathering of the angels for the decree of the position of the Son in the universe. It also mentions that the Son shared the throne with the Father. This time there is even more detail. It states that "the glory of the eternal, self-existent One encircled both."<sup>37</sup> The picture thus given basically says they are both eternal and self-existent. Again, the account talks about how the Son would execute the Father's will. It is not just obedience alone that is needed, but an added detail is supplied that homage is to be given to the Son also. This means that the Son was not just to be obeyed, but also worshipped. This is something that can only happen to the divine. It also makes it clear that the Son would not seek His own glory, but would exalt His Father's glory. However, as noted earlier, they actually share

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>36</sup> "Ellen G. White Estate: Publications," <http://www.whiteestate.org/books/booklist.asp>.

<sup>37</sup> Ellen G. White, *Patriarch and Prophets* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1989), 36.

the same glory. Plus, it is the nature of the selfless character of God to always be seeking the other's glory.<sup>38</sup>

The account continues by clearly showing that Satan is upset that Christ was exalted as the "Son of God as equal with the Father."<sup>39</sup> This means that what the Father presented was not that Jesus was lower, but that He was equal with the Father. In fact, White goes on to say that "There had been no change in the position or authority of Christ. Lucifer's envy and misrepresentation and his claims to equality with Christ had made necessary a statement of the true position of the Son of God; but this had been the same from the beginning."<sup>40</sup> The only reason the Father said what He said was because of Satan's accusations, not because there was any change in the order of heaven. Therefore, Jesus was not suddenly given a change of status; He was always equal in authority and power with the Father.

The first account of the fall of Satan did not have the same amount of detail as what is found in *Spirit of Prophecy* and *Patriarchs and Prophets*. If one just reads *Spiritual Gifts* alone, one could possibly be led to think that Jesus was given his exalted position just before Satan's disgruntled complaints. However, each time White published an account of the fall, added detail is given. Thus, this not only makes it impossible to understand that exaltation of Christ was something that occurred during Lucifer's lifetime, but that Jesus always had the same status. It is therefore important to remember that the added details in White's later accounts help readers understand the earlier accounts. This will be a safeguard from reading into White's accounts a theology that is not consistent with his later writings.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 38.

## Planning Salvation and Subordinationism

The first time Ellen White mentions the council about the plan of salvation was in *Spiritual Gifts*. She states that it was Jesus who is filled with sorrow and sympathy; that it was He that took the initiative to approach the Father and converse about the plan of salvation. It took three attempts of pleading, being “shut in by the glorious light”, to prompt the Father to agree to the Son’s purposed plan.<sup>41</sup> This account can be interpreted in two ways. First, one can see it as Jesus needing the Father’s permission to perform His role in the plan of salvation. Second, one can see Jesus as being the initiator of the plan of salvation and the Father struggling to go along with the plan.

The second time she mentions that same scene, it is a word for word copy of the original statement with changes only in the punctuation.<sup>42</sup> Commenting on this section of *Spirit of Prophecy*, Woodrow Whidden says, “In these pages Ellen G. White makes it very clear that it was the Son who initiated the key move by the Godhead in spontaneously offering Himself up to the Father to come to this sin-cursed world to endure terrible temptations and to die an atoning, sacrificial death for the sinful human race.”<sup>43</sup> Whidden is correct in his assessment of White’s early statement about Jesus being the initiator. One could argue that, yes, He initiated it, but He was still seeking permission from the Father. From the two statements alone, it cannot be determined if Jesus is seeking permission or encouraging an equal. Whidden goes on to state that “the Son offered Himself up to the Father, not because the Father demanded that He do it (as His “subordinate”) but that The Son made the offer to do so according to His own divine

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<sup>41</sup> White, *Spiritual Gifts*, 1:22.

<sup>42</sup> White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, 1:45.

<sup>43</sup> Woodrow W. Whidden, "Core Theological Convictions That Vindicate The Ministry Of Women," <https://atoday.org/core-theological-convictions-that-vindicate-the-ministry-of-women-in-our-church/>.

initiative.”<sup>44</sup> One can also see that the Father was not commanding the Son in White’s account, but, again, it does not necessarily show if Jesus is asking for permission or encouraging an equal. However, Whidden’s idea of initiation of the Son is important because it helps us see that Jesus was not being commanded to do something and thus submitting to the Father’s plan.

Later, both *Spiritual Gifts* and *Spirit of Prophecy* mention that in order to accept the plan of salvation, it was “a struggle with the God of Heaven, whether to let guilty man perish, or to give his beloved Son to die for them.”<sup>45</sup> This is an important piece of information because it makes it evident that the plan of salvation was not something that the Father was ready to accept immediately after it was presented by His Son. It is also clear that it was not a command initiated by the Father for the Son to subordinately accept. The language here makes it more difficult for one to say that the Son was seeking permission, but does not rule it out entirely. Be that as it may, the statement does slightly align more with encouraging an equality view. However, these passages taken alone can be read both ways.

What does it mean that the passage can be read both ways? Let us start by saying that asking someone to do something or be a part of something in no way implies submission. A lieutenant may choose to ask a subordinate to do something; a lieutenant may ask another lieutenant to do something; or a subordinate may ask a lieutenant to do something. Therefore, asking does not necessarily imply that the inquiring person is a subordinate. A superior or equal may ask something of someone just as likely as a subordinate would. In order to see if White’s account is implying subordination or equality, one would have to look for something else other than a simple statement that Jesus asked the Father for counsel about the plan of salvation.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> White, *Spiritual Gifts*, 1:26; White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, 1:48.

There appears to be a connection of these accounts with the Gospel accounts of the garden of Gethsemane. In both accounts of the meeting about the plan of salvation, it took the Son three attempts in order for the Father to accept the plan. Correspondingly, in the garden of Gethsemane, Christ pleaded for the Father to let the cup pass from Him three times. In a reversal of roles of what took place in heaven, it is now the Son struggling with the Father. This struggle was over following through with the plan that Jesus Himself initiated. Therefore, in reality, because of these statements, it is actually the Son being subordinate to His own initiative via the Father rather than Jesus being subordinated to the Father alone.

Later, White gave these words when referring to the planning of salvation in *The Desire of Ages*:

This was a voluntary sacrifice. Jesus might have remained at the Father's side. He might have retained the glory of heaven, and the homage of the angels. But He chose to give back the scepter into the Father's hands, and to step down from the throne of the universe, that He might bring light to the benighted, and life to the perishing.<sup>46</sup>

It is clear that Jesus is the one to volunteer His sacrifice in the plan of salvation. It ended up being accepted because of the love of the Father. However, clearly it should not be assumed that Jesus submitted to a command by His Father. It might not be clear if Jesus was getting permission or persuading an equal; but clearly it was initiated and chosen by the Son to sacrifice His life and the Father capitulated after a struggle because He loved the world so much.

### **Jesus Shows the Father**

As mentioned before, it is after further Bible study in the 1890s when White starts to have the clearest statements about the Trinity. The first book with such statements is *The Desire of Ages*. The book is a theological commentary on the life of Christ and the Gospels. The *Desire*

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<sup>46</sup> White, *The Desire of Ages*, 22.

*of Ages*, having such clear statements about the Trinity, should also contain proof of subordinationism.

However, right from the beginning of the book, it is stated that “‘The light of the knowledge of the glory of God’ is seen ‘in the face of Jesus Christ.’ From the days of eternity the Lord Jesus Christ was one with the Father.”<sup>47</sup> She makes it clear from the start that the Father is one with Jesus. She continues to say that He came for the purpose of showing forth the glory of the Father; that he was to reveal what God was like; that the law of the universe is selflessness and its source is the heart of God.<sup>48</sup>

It is this law of selflessness or love that Christ elucidates. Ellen White states in *The Desire of Ages*:

All things Christ received from God, but He took to give. So in the heavenly courts, in His ministry for all created beings: through the beloved Son, the Father’s life flows out to all; through the Son it returns, in praise and joyous service, a tide of love, to the great Source of all. And thus through Christ the circuit of beneficence is complete, representing the character of the great Giver, the law of life.<sup>49</sup>

This shows that the Son, in subjecting Himself to the Father, is but showing the character of the great Giver. The character of God, both Father and Son, is love. Thus, self-seeking and self-glorifying is not in harmony with either of their characters. Jesus does not seek His own glory, but neither does the Father. They are always glorifying the other; they are completely other-centered; they are the quintessential givers of the universe (including the self-sacrifice of the Spirit to the extent of almost completely losing His own identity in exalting the Father and the

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 21.

Son).<sup>50</sup> Misunderstandings of the Trinity can occur if Their other-centered, self-sacrificing character is not taken into account.

As was stated earlier, it was the purpose of the Father to have His Son show humanity what He is like—completely selfless. In commenting on the Apostle Philip’s misunderstanding about seeing the Father, White says, “Christ had not ceased to be God when He became man. Though He had humbled Himself to humanity, the Godhead was still His own. Christ alone could represent the Father to humanity, and this representation the disciples had been privileged to behold for over three years.”<sup>51</sup> It was humbling to take on the nature of man, but this did not make Jesus any less divine. In fact, by emptying, subjecting, and submitting Himself, Jesus was manifesting the nature of love, which is selflessness.

In fact, what Jesus did by lowering Himself was declare that it was what the Father would do if their positions were switched. Notice what White says in reference to the status and work of Jesus, in comparison to the Father: “Jesus claimed equal rights with God in doing a work equally sacred, and of the same character with that which engaged the Father in heaven.”<sup>52</sup> The work that He did was equal to and of the same character of what the Father did. They were both doing a work that embodied the character of love. They were both giving everything they had to save humanity.

### **Conclusion**

First, we sought to lay out the issue of subordinationism, especially as it stands in comparison to equalitarianism in the very heart of the Trinity. Next, we explored Ellen White’s

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<sup>50</sup> White, *Spiritual Gifts*, 17–23, 45–53. An example of this is in White’s account of the fall of Lucifer and the meeting about the plan of Salvation. The Holy Spirit is absent in these accounts. The Holy Spirit is so focused on exalting the other two that Lucifer is not jealous of Him and He is not even mentioned by White as being in the meeting about salvation. Just because He is missing in the accounts does not mean He does not exist. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 671. White shows He does exist by stating He is “the Third Person of the Godhead”

<sup>51</sup> White, *The Desire of Ages*, 635.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

role in the matter of formulating doctrine or giving new light. It was demonstrated that she had a confirmatory role when the doctrines of the church were formed. That this role continued became evident, even when the doctrine of the Trinity was starting to be explicitly stated in the 1890s. In regard to giving “new light”, she should never be used. Therefore, subordinationism in the Trinity should be proven first by the Bible, and the writings of Ellen White should only be used as was always intended, in a confirmatory function. Then it was demonstrated that her early statements can not only be read with a subordinationism perspective, but also with an equalitarianism position. However, after the doctrine of the Trinity was being explicitly expressed in the 1890s, White was stressing the equality of the Trinity and not a position of hierarchy. Therefore, Ellen White should not be used as an ultimate authority in formulating a doctrine of subordinationism within the Trinity, because that is not the function of her writings, nor is there solid evidence that she even had or claimed such a position.

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