

## WAS JESUS MINOR TO THE FATHER?

### Introduction:

There have been some arguments on the equality of Jesus Christ with God the Father. This issue has generated some concerns among some theologians. Many questions emerge such as; if Jesus is God, does he have same nature, attribute, and power as the Father? Does Jesus incarnation in human form suggest inferiority to the Father? Is there ranking among the

Godhead – the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit? This paper attempts to proffer solutions to these questions.

### NATURE OF CHRIST

In approaching an examination of the biblical teaching regarding Jesus Christ and his nature. It seems best, as the apostle John did in the prologue to his gospel, first to draw attention to one of the most astounding assertion found in the scriptures: that the word who “was with God” and “was God” (John 1:1) “became flesh” (verse 14) .<sup>1</sup> In stating, “The word became flesh and dwelt among us” John set forth a profound truth. The incarnation of God the son is a mystery.<sup>2</sup>

Raoul affirms that not only did the word become flesh but also He “dwelt among us” (verse 14). The term literally means “tabernacle among us ”or” pitched his tent among us.” This powerful expression of the incarnation of the word is also a clear intimation of his pre-existence.<sup>3</sup> However, scripture calls God’s being manifested in the flesh “the mystery of godliness [1Tim 3:16]. One can barely grasp the meaning of this sacred mystery and then only by calling on the Holy Spirit for enlightenment. The nature of Christ is biblically divided into two which are; Divine and Human.<sup>4</sup> His divinity will address his divine power as God while his humanity will address his incarnation among men. But this study will focus mainly on His divine attributes as God in the below discussion.

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<sup>1</sup> Raoul Dederen, “Christ: His Person and Work,” in *Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology*, 12 vols., ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerston: Review and Herald Publishing Association and General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist, 200), 161.

<sup>2</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist, *Seventh-day Adventist Believe* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005), 49.

<sup>3</sup> *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 161.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

## PRE-EXISTENCE OF CHRIST

In the quest to attempt the question about the equality of Christ with the Father, I will venture into the “pre-existence” of Christ. In the New Testament both explicitly and by implication tells us that Jesus, as the word, existed before His birth in Bethlehem, his existence did not begin when he was born in Judea.<sup>5</sup> According to Fuller, Johannine Christians found out that they could express their understanding of the superiority of Jesus using the images of descent of the divine word and pre-existence. Here the logos exceed with and as God prior to any creation.<sup>6</sup>

Christ did not only mention the fact that He was “sent” by the Father (cf Matt. 5:17; 15; 24 Mark 1:38, 10:45; John 5:23) which may be regarded as mere allusions to his prophetic mission but in explicit terms He stated his heavenly origin, that he “came” or “descended” from heaven to earth:” I came from the father and have come into the world.<sup>7</sup> It was proved that our Lord Jesus Christ existed before coming into this world, in glory and in close communion with the father (John 17:5).

Dederen posits that not only Jesus confirmed that He was sent by the father but affirms that “before Abraham was IAM” (8:58), a phrase reminiscent of the Old Testament “I am who I am” (Exd 3:14), the name by which God announced Himself to Moses in the wilderness self-existent and external pre-existence.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, John 1; 15, 30 twice in these passages John the Baptist asserts of Christ that “he was before me”. Though John was older than Jesus Christ, he declares that Christ was before him.<sup>9</sup>

The Unitarian argued that John was stating that by divine appointment Christ is higher in rank and in dignity than John but this is impossible and cannot be sustained by unprejudiced exercise. The text declares that, in point of terms, Christ preceded John.<sup>10</sup> This is the true revelation of his divine identity. John is careful to insist that Jesus identification with God is not blasphemous because Jesus is not a human trying to exalt himself to divine status. The use of the “IAM”

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Reginald H. Fuller, PHEME PERKINS, *Who is This Christ?* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 97-98.

<sup>7</sup> *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 161

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 162

<sup>9</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology, 2 vols.* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Kregel Publications, 1993), 322.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

in John 8:58 derive from the divine self –predication in the Old Testament.<sup>11</sup> Also to the Colossians he writes, “In Him all things were created, in Heaven and on earth, all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (1Tim 1:15). He existed before His birth in Bethlehem.<sup>12</sup> On this Chafer quoted Faustus who comments that; Before Abraham became Abraham, that is the father of many nations, I am or have become the Messiah.<sup>13</sup> The church of Mormon declared in their creed;

We affirm, on the authority of Holy Scripture, that the Being who is known among men as Jesus of Nazareth, and by all who acknowledge His Godhood as Jesus the Christ, existed with the Father prior to birth in the flesh; and that in the preexistent state He was chosen and ordained to be the one and only Savior and Redeemer of the human race. Foreordination implies and comprises preexistence as an essential condition; therefore scriptures bearing upon the one are germane to the other; and consequently in this presentation no segregation of evidence as applying specifically to the preexistence of Christ or to His foreordination will be attempted.<sup>14</sup>

In the opening lines of the Gospel book written by John the apostle, we read: "In the beginning was the Word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made.... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth." <sup>15</sup>

The passage is simple, precise and unambiguous. We may reasonably give to the phrase "In the beginning" the same meaning as attaches thereto in the first line of Genesis; and such signification must indicate a time antecedent to the earliest stages of human existence upon the earth. That the Word is Jesus Christ, who was with the Father in that beginning and who was Himself invested with the powers and rank of Godship, and that He came into the world and dwelt among men, are definitely affirmed. These statements are corroborated through a revelation given to Moses, in which he was permitted to see many of the

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<sup>11</sup> Reginald H. Fuller, PHEME PERKINS, *Who is This Christ?* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 108

<sup>12</sup> *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 162

<sup>13</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology, 2 vols.* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Kregel Publications, 1993), 323.

<sup>14</sup> James E. Talmaze, *Jesus The Christ* (Salt Lake: Desert Book Company, 1922), 3.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 16.

creations of God, and to hear the voice of the Father with respect to the things that had been made: "And by the word of my power, have I created them, which is mine Only Begotten Son, who is full of grace and truth." <sup>16</sup>

Even more impressive and yet more truly conclusive are the personal testimonies of the Savior as to His own pre-existent life and the mission among men to which He had been appointed. No one who accepts Jesus as the Messiah can consistently reject these evidences of His eternal nature.

When, on a certain occasion, the Jews in the synagogue disputed among themselves and murmured because of their failure to understand aright His doctrine concerning Himself, especially as touching His relationship with the Father, Jesus said unto them: "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." And then, continuing the lesson based upon the contrast between the manna with which their fathers had been fed in the wilderness and the bread of life which He had to offer, He added: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven," and again declared "the living Father hath sent me."<sup>17</sup>

## **DIVINE ATTRIBUTES OF CHRIST**

The divine attributes of God will also help to deal with the question about Christ equality with the Father not as a "minor" God to the father. It is probably that almost every essential truth resident in the second person is expressed in some specific name, e.g. Emmanuel speaks of his incarnation relationships, Jesus of his salvation, the son of man of his humanity the son of God of his deity, faithful and true of his manifestations and Jesus Christ our righteous.<sup>18</sup>

The title, Christ, though used as a general identification of the second person, in its technical implication means all that is anticipated in the Old Testament- prophet, priest and king. More also, the first sentence of the first preserved writing of the Apostle Paul employs a designation of deity, which seems to be that commonly used by him, "God our father and the Lord Jesus

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<sup>16</sup> James E. Talmaze, *Jesus The Christ* (Salt Lake: Desert Book Company, 1922), 17.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid*

<sup>18</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology, 2vols.* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Kregel Publications, 1993),

Christ" [1 Thess.1:1 cf. 2Thess 1:1, phil.1:2; 1 Tim.1:2] from this the exalted character of this name and of the one who hears it may be seen.<sup>19</sup>

The line of evidence which demonstrates the pre-existence of Christ on the ground of the truth had been stated that, He is God is wholly uncomplicated. Being God, he has existed from all eternity and will be the same yesterday, today and forever.<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, it is thus demonstrated that every divine name is ascribed as freely to Christ as to the father, and if this titles do not asserts the deity of the son then in candor they do not asserts the deity of the father. Since it is declared by these names that Christ is God, then it follows that he has existed as God before His incarnation.<sup>21</sup> According to the Seventh-day Adventist believe Christ divine attributes with the father are as follows;

1. He is omnipotent. He has all authority and power.[Matt.28:18]
2. He is omnipresence. Am with you always [Matt 28:20]
3. He is immutable – His self existence [Heb 13:8]
4. He is holy- Holiness is part of his nature. [Luke 1:35]
5. He is love [1John 3:16]
6. He is eternal. Everlasting father [Isa.9:6, Micah 5:2, John 1:2,3]<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, the prerogatives of deity are ascribed to Christ as it was stated by chafer;

1. He is creator of all things [John 1;3,10, Col 1:16, Heb 1:10]
2. He is preserver of all things [Heb 1:3, Col 1:17]
3. He pardon sins [Luke 5:24, Col 3:13]
4. Christ will raise the dead. [2 Cor 1:9,John 5:21, John11:25].
5. Christ apportions the reward of saints.[2 cor.5:10]

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 338

<sup>20</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology, 5vols.* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Kregel Publications, 1993), 7.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist, *Seventh-day Adventist Believe* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005), 50

6. The judgement of the world is committed to Christ. [John 5:22, Rev.20:12].<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, the divine attributes of Christ shows that Christ is truly God. The idea that anyone could be described as “God” would have been blasphemous within this context.<sup>24</sup>

## TESTIMONY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

The doctrine of redemption is the distinguishing doctrine of the bible. From the nature of the work which He was to accomplish, it was necessary that he should be at once God and man.<sup>25</sup> The fundamental datum of Old Testament theology is the uniqueness and unity of Israel’s God. Contrary to the polytheism of Israel neighbours. Thus in Shema Moses declared “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one” (ehad, Deut.6:4). The Old Testament emphasis on the unity of God being plural pronouns are used to describe the actions of Godhead (Gen1:26; 3:22; 11:7).<sup>26</sup>

Moreover, given the fact that the rest of the scriptures depict three persons working together in the Opera ad extra (Ps.33: 6. John 1:3)<sup>27</sup>

Gordon, affirms that the plurality of persons in the Godhead would seem most acceptable to hold the interpretation, that this is a reference to the triune God. More also, the old testament does predict a messiah, whom the psalmist and prophets set forth as the son of God, as the counsellor, the prince of peace, the mighty God and to whom every knee should bow and tongue confess, of things in heaven and things on earth, is none other than He whom we now recognize and worship as our God.<sup>28</sup>

In psalm 45 a king is described as who must be a divine person.<sup>29</sup> He is addressed as God, “Thy throne O God is forever and ever,” which is quoted Hebrews and applied to Jesus. He was addressed as Adonai in Psalm 110:5 never given to any but the true God. In the above statements it has been made

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<sup>23</sup> Chafer, 2 vols. 342-44.

<sup>24</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology an Introduction* (Massachusetts: Cambridge, Black Publishers Inc., 1994), 279.

<sup>25</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* 1 vol. (Hindrickson Publishers, Inc. Edition. USA), 482.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Gordon R. Lewis, Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology* 3 vols. (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishers), 258.

<sup>28</sup> Charles, 490.

<sup>29</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* 1 vol. (Hindrickson Publishers, Inc. Edition. USA), 491

clear that Christ is God and equal with the father through the eye of the Old Testament. He was called Elohim, Adonai, and the mighty God, exercising all divine prerogatives, and entitled to divine worship from men and angels.<sup>30</sup>

## TESTIMONY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

When I look at the man of Nazareth in the light of New Testament teachings, I see not only perfect humanity but veiled deity.<sup>31</sup> The proof of Christ divinity in the New Testament is derived from the fact that He is everywhere called Lord. The Lord; Our Lord. It is admitted that the Greek word means κύριος and one who has the authority of an owner, whether of men or things.<sup>32</sup> We have but one Lord; and Jesus Christ is Lord. In Roman 10:13, quotes Joel 2:32, which speaks of Jehovah and applies to Christ saying, whoever call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. As he is our Lord, in the sense of being our absolute proprietor, our maker, preserver, and redeemer.<sup>33</sup>

## MYSTERY OF JESUS

The question about his equality with the Father has been a controversy even among the scholars, looking at his nature. If Christ is equal, why must He address God as His father? How then can God and man be united as one person?

Jesus identification with men is brought out (Matt.12:18) it is in his baptismal experience that He enters this role to suffer for humanity for the sons of the word.<sup>34</sup> Though he is God but He came in form of man, to identify with us in our infirmities, to redeem us. Therefore Jesus "incarnation" had not suggested inferiority to the father. The son ship of Christ is by "incarnation" but his real nature is God. Christ addressed God as father because of fraternalism not superiority. He was equal to the father, Heb 2:14-17.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 492

<sup>31</sup> G. Campbell Morgan, *The Westminster Pulpit* 9vols. (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 2006), 221.

<sup>32</sup> Charles, 495.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 32

<sup>34</sup> E. Best, "Christology," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Mi: Grand Rapids, Baker Books), 22.

White asserts that Christ was one with the father, he was the image of God, the image of his greatness and majesty, “The outshining of His glory”<sup>35</sup> She continues that Christ came to manifest the glory that He came to our world. He came to reveal the light of God’s love. In the beginning God was revealed in the works of creation. It was Christ that spread the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth.<sup>36</sup> Though He was born in the likeness of man, He was similar to us; Heb. 2 14-17 but He had no propensities to sin. He was born in the city of David, (Luke 2;4-11) put to death in Jerusalem. (John 18:28-19:37), He ate (Mk 2:16), slept (Matt. 8:24) and grew tired (John 4:6) like other humans.<sup>37</sup>

In one assessment of the human nature of Jesus, it is necessary to take account of another clear testimony of the new testament concerning His sinless character; it was clearly stated in Heb 4:15, 1peter 2:22; 1John 3:5, that He knew “NO SIN”<sup>38</sup>

According to Adam, Jesus was the one described by Micah when he was told of a person” whose going forth have been from old, from everlasting” (Micah 5:2). He was once described by Isaiah the mighty God, the everlasting father (Isa 9.6).<sup>39</sup> The incarnation of Christ is absolutely mind boggling! Said Ellen White:”when we want a deep problem to study, let us fix our minds on the most marvellous things that ever took place on earth or heaven, the incarnation of the son of God”<sup>40</sup>

However, it will come to mind the statement made at council of Nicene, quoting from the Nicene Creed. “We all with one voice teach... that our Lord Jesus Christ is one and the same God, the same perfect in Godhead, the same perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man in all things like unto us, sin only excepted... one and the same Christ, son , Lord and only begotten, made known in two nature[which exist] without confusion, without change, without division, without separation...”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1940), 9.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 35

<sup>37</sup> *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 163.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* 164

<sup>39</sup> Roy Adams, *The Nature of Christ* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1994), 56

<sup>40</sup> *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible commentary (SDABC)*, rev. ed.,ed. Francis D. Nichol ( Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1976-80).

<sup>41</sup> Adams,57.

Furthermore, Macleod talks about son as distinct person, substantial with the father.<sup>42</sup>

The Nicene Creed expresses the doctrine of the Trinity in the vocabulary of fourth-century Christianity, derived to a considerable degree from the philosophical categories of ancient Greece. I now wish to show briefly that what I have expounded so far largely in my own words is (except in one respect) indeed either the explicit doctrine of the Creed, or the way in which it was uncontroversial understood by later theologians and councils. The Nicene Creed begins by affirming Christian belief in 'one God'; but goes on to distinguish between 'God the Father', 'one Lord . . . Son of God begotten from the Father . . . true God from true God . . . of one essence with the Father', and 'the Holy Spirit . . . who together with the Father and the Son is worshipped and together glorified'. This is the doctrine that God is a Trinity.<sup>43</sup>

## THE SONSHIP OF CHRIST

It was the rise of Arianism that forced the issue into prominence, because it called in question not so much the sonship of Christ as his eternal pre-existence, arguing that the very fact that he was Son meant that he came into being after the father; and arguing further that he was the creature made in time, and made out of nothing: 'there was when he was not.'<sup>44</sup>

Over again this the Nicene Creed insisted that the son was begotten, not made; that he was begotten of the very essence of the father; that he was the only begotten; and that he was begotten before all ages.<sup>45</sup>

However, after Nicea the idea of the eternal sonship became the received doctrine of the Christian church, and it pervades the writings of Athanasius, Basil, Gregory of Nazianzen, Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine.<sup>46</sup> Jesus to be God Incarnate is that the life of Jesus was a perfect human life which involved much suffering. The evidence for the goodness of another person's life can, of course, come only from their public behaviour. But I suggest that such evidence as there

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<sup>42</sup> Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ; Contours of Christian Theology*, ed. Gerald Bray (ILL: Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 1998), 41.

<sup>43</sup> James E. Talmaze, *Jesus The Christ* (Salt Lake: Desert Book Company, 1922), 50

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> James E. Talmaze, *Jesus The Christ* (Salt Lake: Desert Book Company, 1922), 50

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

is of Jesus's public behaviour is what we would expect if he led a perfect human life. One aspect of this, that Jesus **ate with society's outcasts** as well as eating with the Pharisees, seems virtually undisputed.<sup>47</sup>

On this issue, Swinburne quotes the distinguished Jewish scholar Geza Vermes, In one respect more than any other [Jesus] differed from both his contemporaries and even his prophetic predecessors. The prophets spoke on behalf of the honest poor, and defended the widows and the fatherless, those oppressed and exploited by the wicked, rich and powerful. Jesus went further. In addition to proclaiming these blessed, he actually took his stand among the pariahs of his world, those despised by the respectable .Sinners were his table-companions and the ostracized tax-collectors and prostitutes his friends."<sup>48</sup>

Through the atonement accomplished by Jesus Christ—a redeeming service, vicariously rendered in behalf of mankind, all of whom have become estranged from God by the effects of sin both inherited and individually incurred—the way is opened for a reconciliation whereby man may come again into communion with God, and be made fit to dwell anew and forever in the presence of his Eternal Father. This basal thought is admirably implied in our English word, "atonement," which, as its syllables attest, is *at-one-ment*, "denoting reconciliation, or the bringing into agreement of those who have been estranged."<sup>49</sup>The effect of the atonement may be conveniently considered as twofold:

1. The universal redemption of the human race from death invoked by the fall of our first parents; and,
2. Salvation, whereby means of relief from the results of individual sin are provided.

The victory over death was made manifest in the resurrection of the crucified Christ; He was the first to pass from death to immortality and so is justly known as "the first fruits of them that slept."<sup>50</sup> That the resurrection of the dead so inaugurated is to be extended to everyone who has or shall have lived is proved by an abundance of scriptural evidence. Following our Lord's

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Richard Swinburne, *Was Jesus God?* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 86.

<sup>49</sup> James E. Talmaze, *Jesus The Christ* (Salt Lake: Desert Book Company, 1922), 52

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

resurrection, others who had slept in the tomb arose and were seen of many, not as spirit-apparitions but as resurrected beings possessing immortalized bodies: "And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many."<sup>51</sup>

## CONCLUSION

It has been clearly stated in the discus so far that Christ is not "Minor" to the Father. It is thus demonstrated that every divine name is ascribed as freely to Christ as to the Father since it is declared by these names that Christ is God, then it follows that he has existed as God before His incarnation.<sup>52</sup>

The sonship of Christ is by functionality and not by superiority or ranking. In the unity of this Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power and eternity.

In summery J.C Philpot, says eternally He is God, but only from incarnation has he been son... He is no external son always subservient to God, always less than God, always under God. Son ship is an analogy to help us understand Christ's essential relationship and willing submission to the father for the sake of our redemption... [H] Is son ship began in a point of term, not in eternity. His life as son began in this world.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> James E. Talmaze, *Jesus The Christ* (Salt Lake: Desert Book Company, 1922), 53

<sup>52</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology, 5vols.* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Kregel Publications, 1993), 17.

<sup>53</sup> Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ; Contours of Christian Theology*, ed. Gerald Bray (ILL: Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 1998), 41

The sonship is an analogy to help us understand Christ's essential relationship and willing submission to the father for the sake of our redemption. The father-son idea is not all about ranking and not said according to substance but the terms are used reciprocally and in relation each to the other.

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