

Four Titles of the Godhead with Emphasis on the Holy Spirit¹

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Abstract

The Godhead is one. It consists of three Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Father and Son have their own personalities, as the Holy Spirit does too. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Godhead. The issue regarding the existence of the Holy Spirit has been debated among Christians. Some argue that the Holy Spirit just comes out of the Father or of the Son. Others believe that the Holy Spirit is a Person or a Being, that the Holy Spirit has a personality as well as the Father and the Son. The issue discussed in this study is about whether the biblical evidence supports the idea that the Holy Spirit is a living Being or just a power (a substance). A further purpose of the study is to understand the concept held by an influential twentieth-century writer (E. G. White) about the Holy Spirit, especially as it relates to the nature of Holy Spirit as a Person or a Being. This writer uses four titles regarding the Holy Spirit as well as the Father and the Son. They are: (1) Three powers in heaven; (2) Three living Persons in heaven; (3) Three Characters in heaven; and (4) Three Dignitaries in heaven. However, the nature of the Holy Spirit is a mystery for human beings.

Keywords: *Godhead, power, person, character, dignitary*

Introduction

The Holy Spirit is one of three Persons of the Godhead. In the Scriptures, the term “Trinity” does not appear. However, terms such as “godliness” or “the Godhead” are used (see Acts 17:27; Romans 1:20; Col. 2:9). The Godhead is said to be one (Deut. 6: 4; Mark 12:29; 1 Tim. 1:17; 2:5). This one-ness, the Bible clearly states, is to be understood to involve three Persons who are eternal (Coeternal), equal (Coequal), and Coexist. The three Persons of God are the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Some verses that state this are (parentheses below added by the author):

1. God (the Father) sent me (the Son of God) with His Spirit (the Holy Spirit) (Isa. 48:16).
2. I (the Father) put My Spirit (the Holy Spirit) upon Him (the Son of God) (Isa. 42: 1).
3. The Father, the Son of God, and the Holy Spirit are present together in the baptism of Jesus Christ (Matt. 3: 13-17).
4. Baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19).
5. The Holy Spirit descends upon Mary and the power of the Highest God (the Father) overshadows Mary, and the Son of God will be born (Matt. 1:20; Luke 1:35).
6. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all (2 Cor. 13:14).

Human understanding of the Father as one Person and the Son of God (Jesus Christ) as a separate Person surely need not be debated with the weight of biblical evidence just given. Both the Father and the Son of God have personalities and beings that are different from one another. One example in the Bible states that the Father has a form that seems to be projected as the Older One who sits on the throne (Dan. 7:9; Rev. 4:2, 3). Daniel described the Son of God, Jesus Christ, as “One like the Son of Man” who came to meet another distinguished Man (Dan. 7:13, 14, NKJV). Notice the text says that “One like the Son of Man” received dominion and glory and a kingdom from the Ancient One (the Father). In the book of Revelation, Jesus is described as “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Branch of David, the Lamb who was slain” (Rev. 5:5, 6) who received a scroll with seven

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seals from the Father who sat on the throne (Rev. 5:7). Jesus himself said, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). Here, then, there are two Persons of Godhead, but both are one.

The prolific twentieth-century American religious writer considered in this paper is Ellen G. White (1827-1915). She wrote that the form of the Father and the Son of God are separate.

I saw a throne, and on it resided the Father and the Son. I looked at Jesus' face and admired His noble person. The Father cannot be seen, for a cloud of glory surrounds Him. I asked Jesus if His Father had the same form as Himself. He said that it was, but I could not see Him, for that He said: 'If you only once see His personal glory, then you will perish' (White, 1882, p. 54).

In this quotation, it says that the Father has a form and His form is similar to the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, the Holy Spirit is depicted in the Bible in various ways. First, the Holy Spirit is described as a dove during the baptism of Jesus Christ (Matt. 3:16). The Holy Spirit or the Spirit of God is also described as "hovering above the surface of the water" (Gen. 1:2). The Godhead is also described as hovering like an eagle when the Israelites walked in the wilderness for forty years (see Deut. 32:11-12). But in the story of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles like tongues of fire (Acts 2:2-4). The Holy Spirit is also described as seven torches burning before the throne of God (Rev. 4:5). Maybe there are still more pictures of the Holy Spirit in the Bible.

However, there is one piece of advice given by White about the nature of the Holy Spirit, namely:

The Nature of the Holy Spirit is a mystery. Men cannot explain it, because the Lord has not revealed it to them. Men have beautiful views of bringing together passages of Scripture on them, but the acceptance of these views will not strengthen the church. Regarding such mysteries, which are too deep for human understanding, silence is golden (White, 1911, p. 52).

In other words, the nature of the Holy Spirit is still a mystery to humans even though humans have been trying to understand Him.

Bible Texts Regarding Holy Spirit

The issue of the personality of the Holy Spirit arises because of several statements in the Bible relating to the term given to the Holy Spirit, namely as the Spirit of God or the Spirit of Jesus Christ. The examples of these verses, as used in the Revised Standard Version, are:

1. "The Spirit of God" (Gen. 1:2; Matt. 3:16; Rom. 8:14; Phi. 3:3; 1 John 4:2).
2. "The Spirit of the Lord God" (Isa. 61:1)
3. "The Spirit of your Father" (Matt. 10:20).
4. "The Spirit of the Lord" (Judg. 3:10; 6:34).
5. "The Spirit of the Lord" (Luke 4:18; Acts 8:39).
6. "The Spirit of Jesus" (Acts 16: 7).
7. "The Spirit of Jesus Christ" (Phi. 1:19).
8. "The Spirit of His Son" (Gal. 4: 6).
9. "The Spirit of Christ" (Romans 8:9; 1 Peter 1:11).

These texts present the Holy Spirit as one Person, and as one of the three Persons of the Godhead. That is, the Holy Spirit is not a substance that comes out of the Father or Son of God even though there are terms in the Bible such as "Spirit of God", "Spirit of your Father", "Spirit of Jesus Christ", and "Spirit of Jesus." God's Spirit is actually the Holy Spirit Himself. This can be seen in Joel 2:28-29. There it is said that God will pour out His Spirit on humans. Joel's prophecy was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, where Luke wrote that the Holy Spirit of God descended upon the apostles so that they acted as in subordination to the Spirit (Acts 2:4). Peter also asserted that the prophecy of

Joel was fulfilled on Pentecost (Acts 2:14-20). Thus, the Spirit of God (My Spirit) mentioned in Joel 2:28-29 is the Holy Spirit Himself.

Identification of the Problems

What is White's understanding of the existence of the Holy Spirit? Does the Holy Spirit have His own form and Person just as God the Father and the Son of God have their respective forms? Or is the Holy Spirit a substance that comes out of the Father or out of the Son of God?

In this paper, the research carried out relates to the evidence in the writings of Ellen White of the existence of the Holy Spirit as one Person, and as one of the three Personalities of the Godhead. She was one of the pioneers in the establishment of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the United States. Initially, she was a Methodist, but she accepted William Miller's message about Jesus' second coming and was baptized, and actively participated in proclaiming the message of Jesus' return. Her written work is accepted by the Seventh-day Adventist Church as inspired by the Holy Spirit. Her writing is also accepted as a gift of Prophecy at the end of time according to Revelation 12:17 and 19:10. The result is that her writing is regarded as a small light to lead to the bright light, the Bible (for further explanation, see Knight (2008), pp. 46-49; Ministerial Association, 1988, pp. 227-228).

The purpose of this research is to understand the explanation given in White's writings concerning the existence of the Holy Spirit as one Person, and as one of the three Persons of God.

Statement of Doctrines of Seventh-day Adventist Church

In this section, the doctrine of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA) is given as it relates to the Godhead, namely: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This needs to be conveyed so that readers can understand the denomination's understanding about the Godhead, which was influenced to a degree by White.

Doctrine of the Godhead

The following statement gives the substance of the doctrine as understood by the SDA church.

There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three coeternal Persons. God is immortal, all-powerful, all-knowing, above all, and ever-present. He is infinite and beyond human comprehension, yet known through His self-revelation. He is forever worthy of worship, adoration, and service by the whole creation. (Deut. 6: 4; Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Peter 1:2; 1 Tim. 1:17; Rev. 14:7) (Secretariat, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist, [Secretariat, GC of SDA] 2005, p. 9).

From the statement of the doctrine above, it can be concluded that the Godhead is one (there is only one God) and consists of three Persons: namely the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. All three are one and have the same characters and attributes from eternity to eternity. The word "one" is not used here in the mathematical sense, but it conveys the concept of unity. The word one or *echād* (Hebrew) in Old Testament understanding is used as an adjective of quality. This word focuses on unity, uniqueness, and monotheism (Carpenter & Grisanti, 1997). Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:4 in Mark 12:29 (compare to 1 Tim. 2:5; Gal. 3:20; John. 10:30). The Septuagint (ancient Greek translation) in Deuteronomy 6:4 uses *heis* (Greek) where *echād* is found in the original: ("[The] Lord our God is one Lord"). In the New Testament, the word *heis*, if relating to the Godhead (God), is translated "one" as in Mark 12:29; 1 Tim. 2:5; John 10:30; Gal. 3:20 (For further explanation of the word *heis*, see Bartels, 1986, pp. 719-723).

The word one, which in Hebrew is *echād*, is also used to describe men and women who have been united in marriage and are one (Gen. 2:24). Moses could have actually used the word *yāchîd* which means "only one" (Jensen, 1998, pp. 349-351) both in Deuteronomy 6:4 and Genesis 2:24, but he did not. Instead, he used the word *yāchîd* to declare Isaac as the only child of Abraham (Gen.

22:2, 12, 16). This means that something is stated clearly here about the nature of God, namely, the unity of distinct parts or elements.

Doctrine of the Father

God the eternal Father is the Creator, Source, Sustainer, and Sovereign of all creation. He is just and holy, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. The qualities and powers exhibited in the Son and the Holy Spirit are also revelations of the Father (Gen. 1:1; Rev. 4:11; 1 Cor. 15:28; John 3:16; 1 John 4:8; 1 Tim. 1:17; Exod. 34:6, 7; John 14: 9) (Secretariat, GC of SDA, 2005, pp. 9-10).

From the doctrinal statement above, it can be concluded that God the Father is one of the three Persons of Godhead. He is the Creator, Sustainer, Source, and King of the universe. The nature and character of the Father can be known through the Son of God and the Holy Spirit.

Doctrine of the Son

God the eternal Son became incarnate in Jesus Christ. Through Him all things were created, the character of God is revealed, the salvation of humanity is accomplished and the world is judged. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He lived and experienced temptation as a human being, but perfectly exemplified the righteousness and love of God. By His miracles, He manifested God's power and was attested as God's promised Messiah. He suffered and died voluntarily on the cross for our sins and in our place, was raised from the dead, and ascended to minister in the heavenly sanctuary in our behalf. He will come again in glory and for the final deliverance of His people and the restoration of all things (John 1:1-3; Col. 1:15-19; John 10:30; 14:9; Romans 6:23; 2 Cor. 5:17-19; John 5:22; Luke 1:35; Phi. 2:5-11; Heb. 2:9-18; 1 Cor. 15:3,4; Heb. 8:1,2; John 14:1-3) (Secretariat, GC of SDA, 2005, p. 10).

From the statement of the doctrine above, it can be concluded that Jesus is an eternal God who became human and savior. The entire work of the Father on earth is carried out by the Son of God, including the creation and savior of mankind. He came to the world to express God's character directly to humans. That is why Jesus said: "Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father; how do you say: show the Father to us?" (John 14:9). In other words, "Christ is the perfect revelation of God" (White, 1922, p. 83). Jesus Christ, who is called the Son of God, is the second person in the Godhead.

Doctrine of Holy Spirit

God the eternal Spirit was active with the Father and the Son in Creation, incarnation, and redemption. He inspired the writers of Scripture. He filled Christ's life with power. He draws and convicts human beings; and those who respond He renews and transforms into the image of God. Sent by the Father and the Son to be always with His children, He extends spiritual gifts to the church, empowers it to bear witness to Christ, and in harmony with the Scriptures leads it into all truth. (Gen. 1:1, 2; Luke 1:35; 4:18; Acts 10:38; 2 Peter. 1:21; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 4: 11, 12; Acts 1:8; John 14:16-18, 26; 15:26, 27; 16:7-13) (Secretariat, GC of SDA, 2005, p. 10).

From the statement of the doctrine above, it can be concluded that the Holy Spirit has existed since eternity along with the Father and the Son of God. He is also involved in all activities of Godhead. Even after the ascension of Jesus Christ to heaven, the Holy Spirit does a greater work for humans, as a Helper (John 14:16) and Comforter (John 14:26). The Holy Spirit is one of the three Persons of God. The Holy Spirit is a different Person from God the Father and God the Son. The Holy Spirit prays; He also helps God's church to both understand and preach the truth throughout the world.

White's Statements Regarding the Existence of Holy Spirit

In the next section, White's statements will be discussed relating to the existence of the Holy Spirit as a Person, and as one of the three Persons of Godhead.

One of Three Powers of Godhead

The first quotation to consider is as follows:

In the great closing work, we shall meet with preplexities that we know not how to deal with; but let us not forget that *three great powers of heaven* are working, that a divine hand is on the wheel, and that God will bring His promises to pass (White, 1991, p. 356 – italic emphasis added).

Another passage by the same author declares:

There are three living persons of the heavenly trio; *in the name of these three great powers – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit* – those who receive Christ by living faith are baptized, and these powers will cooperate with the obedient subjects of heaven in their efforts to live the new life in Christ (White, 1946, p. 615 – italic emphasis added).

From these statements, we find that White asserts there are three great powers in heaven, namely the Father, the Son of God and the Holy Spirit.

These three great powers, who were declared as infinite powers (White, 1901), could not be angels, because angels are never spoken of as equivalent to God. Angels receive power from God, but the Godhead has power in themselves. If the Holy Spirit is a substance that comes out of the Father or from the Son of God, then her statement would mention two great powers, not three great powers.

The Bible also mentions the same thing, that the Godhead is power or *dunamis* in Greek. We can read in Matthew 26:64 that says "Jesus says to him, 'You have said so. But I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power (*dunamis* in Greek), and coming on the clouds of heaven'" (Revised Standard Version; see also Mark 16:19; Luke 22:69). We know that Jesus is sitting right now at the right hand of the Father, as the Father Himself announced it in the book of Hebrews 1:13: "But to which of the heavenly agents has He ever said, sit thou by my right hand, till I make thine enemies the footstool of thy feet?" (compared to Heb. 1:3). In other words, the Father is powerful, as well as the Son and the Holy Spirit, for They are equal.

One of Three Persons of Godhead

A statement relevant here equates the phrase "these [three] great powers" with an alternative, i.e., "three living Persons of the heavenly trio."

The comforter that Christ promised to send after He ascended to Heaven is the Spirit in *all the fullness of the Godhead*, making manifest the power of divine grace to all who receive and believe in Christ as a personal Saviour. There are *three living persons of the heavenly trio; in the name of these great powers—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit*—those who receive Christ by living faith are baptized, and these powers will cooperate with the obedient subjects of heaven in their efforts to live new life in Christ (White, 1946, p. 615 – emphasis added).

The quotation further states: "We need to realize that the Holy Spirit, *who is as much a person as God is a person*, is walking through these grounds (p. 616, emphasis added). It means that we need to realize that the Holy Spirit is a Person like God. The Holy Spirit can also be said to be "*the mighty agency of the Third Person of the Godhead*" (White, 1898, p. 671, emphasis added).

There are several important points in the quotations above. First, the Holy Spirit is God because in Him all the fullness of God abides. A statement like this is also inherent in the Son of God when He lived in the world. Paul said that in Jesus Christ, the Son of God dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead (Col. 1:19; 2:9). How about the Father? White (1946) wrote, "The Father is all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and is invisible to mortal sight. The Son is all the fullness of the Godhead

manifested. Here is shown the personality of the Father” (p. 614). That means, the Father is the fullness of the physical Godhead and is not visible to mortal vision. The Son is the fullness of God manifested. The Word of God declares Him to be “the image of the form of His Person.” Here the personality of the Father is shown.

How about Jesus, the Son of God”? Paul says in Hebrew 1:3: “Who, being the radiance of His (The Father’s) glory, and the exact image of His (Father) essence (*hupos* in Greek), and upholding all things by the word of His power, having made purification, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” From this verse we may draw the conclusion that the Father has a personality; Jesus as the Son of God has a personality like the Father (the exact image of his essence). If the Father and the Son have personalities, then the Holy Spirit also has a personality, for They are three great powers in heaven and are equal.

Second, the “great powers of heaven” are also referred to as three living Persons. The conclusions that can be taken are not much different from the conclusions in the previous quotations that there are three Persons in the Godhead: Father, Son of God and the Holy Spirit. As the Father and Son of God are two Persons distinct from each other, then the same treatment must also be given to the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit is one of the three great powers of heaven; The Holy Spirit is one of the three Persons who constitute the heavenly trio. White clearly stated that the three heavenly Persons are living. Substances are not living things. Strictly speaking, the Holy Spirit is a living Person, possessing a personality, and is not a substance or force that comes out from the Father or the Son of God.

This was White’s view too, as another quote confirms:

. . . *the Holy Spirit is a person The Holy Spirit has a personality*, else He could not bear witness to our spirits and with our spirits that we are the children of God. He must also be a divine person, else He could not search out the secrets which lie hidden in the mind of God (White, 1946, p. 617, emphasis added).

The Holy Spirit has a personality, otherwise He cannot bear witness to our spirit and with our spirit that we are children of God. He must also be a Divine Person, if not He cannot investigate the hidden things that are stored in God’s mind as Paul says: “But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God” (1 Corinthians 2:10, KJV).

One of Three Dignitaries of Godhead

The “three great powers of heaven” are also called “heavenly dignitaries:” “*The eternal heavenly dignitaries—God, and Christ, and the Holy Spirit—arming them (the disciples) with more than mortal energy . . . would advance with them to the work and convince the world of sin*” (White, 1946, p. 614, emphasis added).

In another place White further emphasized that “the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—*the three great personal Dignitaries of heaven*” (White, 1990, p. 204; White, 1955, p. 351, emphasis added). This means that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three great authorities in heaven. The three heavenly great powers are also heavenly Magnifiers. Angels are not heavenly dignitaries. Only God is the heavenly Magnifier.

Here again it is inferred that the Holy Spirit is not a substance, but a Person – a Person who is the same as God the Father and the Son of God.

One of Three Characters of Godhead

The Holy Spirit is also referred to as a character: “*The three great and glorious heavenly characters are present on the occasion of baptism*” (White, 1990, p. 389, emphasis added). This means that three great and noble Characters of Heaven were present at Christ’s baptismal event. God the Father, the Son of God and the Holy Spirit are heavenly figures, which means each of them has a personality separated from each other.

“When men and women, truly converted, are baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, *these three representatives of heavenly authority behold the scene*” (White, 1990, p. 29,

emphasis added). Here it is stated that there are three heavenly authorities, meaning that the Holy Spirit is a Person, not a substance.

Conclusion

The scriptural evidence, as this author reads it, and White's interpretation of it, indicates that the Godhead is One. The One Godhead consists of three Persons: The Father, The Son of God, and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is one of the three Persons of Godhead. He is a separate Person from the Father and the Son of God. He has existed since eternity with the Father and with the Son. He is not one substance or energy that comes out of the Father or the Son of God. The Holy Spirit is involved in all divine activities.

White writes of the Holy Spirit as one of the three great powers of Godhead. The Holy Spirit is also one of the three Persons of Godhead. He can be considered one of three characters of Godhead. Finally, the Holy Spirit is one of the three dignitaries of the Godhead. These four titles also exist in the Bible such as in Power—*dunamis* (Matt. 26:64, NKJV); Person—*panim* (Job 13:8) or *hupos* (Heb. 1:3); Character—*charaktér* (Heb. 1:3) or *eikón* (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15); Dignitaries (or exalted one)—*sagab* (Isa. 33:5) or *hupsoō* (Acts 5:31).

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