"Remember that Christ Risked All"

Ellen White's Theology of Infinite Risk

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Content

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If we gaze even a moment upon the sun in its meridian glory, then when we turn away our eyes, the image of the sun will appear in everything upon which we look. Thus it is when we behold Jesus; everything we look upon reflects His image, the Sun of righteousness. We cannot see anything else, or talk of anything else. His image is imprinted upon the eye of the soul and affects every portion of our daily life, softening and subduing our whole nature. By beholding, we are conformed to the divine similitude, even the likeness of Christ. (Ellen G. White, Lt40 1896, para.5; 11LtMs)

Epigraph

"But He stepped still lower; the man must humble Himself as a man to bear insult, reproach, shameful accusations, and abuse. There seemed to be no safe place for Him in His own territory. He had to flee from place to place for His life. He was betrayed by one of His disciples; He was denied by one of His most zealous followers. He was mocked. He was crowned with a crown of thorns. He was scourged. He was forced to bear the burden of the cross. He was not insensible to this contempt and ignominy. He submitted, but, oh! He felt the bitterness as no other being could feel it. He was pure, holy, and undefiled, yet arraigned as a criminal! The adorable Redeemer stepped down from the highest exaltation. Step by step He humbled Himself to die—but what a death! It was the most shameful, the most cruel the death upon the cross as a malefactor. He did not die as a hero in the eyes of the world, loaded with honors, as men in battle. He died as a condemned criminal, suspended between the heavens and the earth—died a lingering death of shame, exposed to the tauntings and revilings of a debased, crime-loaded, profligate multitude! "All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head." Psalm 22:7. He was numbered with the transgressors, He expired amid derision, and His kinsmen according to the flesh disowned Him. His mother beheld His humiliation, and He was forced to see the sword pierce her heart. He endured the cross, despised the shame. He made it of small account in consideration of the results that He was working out in behalf of, not only the inhabitants of this speck of a world, but the whole universe, every world which God had created."

(Ellen G. White, 5BC 1127.3)

"The spotless Son of God hung upon the cross, His flesh lacerated with stripes; those hands so often reached out in blessing, nailed to the wooden bars; those feet so tireless on ministries of love, spiked to the tree; that royal head pierced by the crown of thorns; those quivering lips shaped to the cry of woe. And all that He endured—the blood drops that flowed from His head, His hands, His feet, the agony that racked His frame, and the unutterable anguish that filled His soul at the hiding of His Father's face—speaks to each child of humanity, declaring, It is for thee that the Son of God consents to bear this burden of guilt; for thee He spoils the domain of death, and opens the gates of Paradise. He who stilled the angry waves and walked the foam-capped billows, who made devils tremble and disease flee, who opened blind eyes and called forth the dead to life,—offers Himself upon the cross as a sacrifice, and this from love to thee. He, the Sin Bearer, endures the wrath of divine justice, and for thy sake becomes sin itself."

(Ellen G. White, DA, 755)

Short Abstract

The New Testament states that Christ, as the Son of God incarnate, died for the sins of the world. But could the story have gone differently? What if Christ had sinned? Could the tomb have remained closed? More precisely, Could the Son of God be eternally separated from communion with the Father and eventually die and go out of existence?

Mainstream theology often argued for Christ's impossibility to change (immutability), be separated from the triune God (indivisibility), and sin (impeccability). Consequently, there was no potential risk to his life; his death on the cross could not affect in any form his divine life. Using a metaphor, these concepts would guarantee for Christ a jump with a parachute. Would not the cross, instead, need a risk, or the giving up of something in favour of someone else? Here is where the question finds its *raison d'être*: Could the divine Son of God incarnate risk his eternal existence, losing himself forever with all humankind? This is a question that is rarely considered or discussed. The intriguing dilemma is less-explored, underestimated, or even neglected in Christological debates.

This research aims to underscore the significance of examining this particular Christological perspective through the work of the most prominent theologian of Adventism, Ellen White, a woman among the most prolific authors of the late 1800s. Considered by some a divinely-inspired prophet and certainly a significant figure for her influence on religion, White delves into what she calls the "infinite risk," the potential reality of the death of God the Son. In a 'theological world' of different Christologies, her contribution to the scholarly debate has not been considered, and even less her "infinite risk" theology. Analysing White's Christology may shed light on the still open question of what (could have) happened at the cross, cutting new paths in the comprehension of God's love towards humanity.

Long Abstract

Christians believe that Christ, as the incarnate Son of God, died for the sins of the world. However, could the story have unfolded differently? Could Christ have sinned and faced eternal death? Could there have been a Gospel without a resurrection narrative? Would the tomb have remained sealed if Christ had sinned? Could the Son of God have been permanently separated from communion with the Father? If Christ were incapable of sinning, there would not have been a potential risk to his life. This is where the question finds its *raison d'être*: Was there a possibility for the divine Son of God, Christ, to sin and face the consequences as any human being would? In other words, could the divine Son of God have risked his eternal life, forever losing himself or ceasing to exist? This question is rarely considered or discussed, and the intriguing dilemma is often overlooked, underestimated, or even neglected in Christological debates.

Most Christian authors have held the view that the human will of Christ operated in a manner where the outcome of his mission was almost predetermined. There is widespread agreement in Christology, albeit with varying nuances, that Christ could not change in his divine nature (immutability), and he is 'indivisible' from the triune God. Furthermore, it is widely argued that Christ could not sin (impeccability) and that his free will remained unaffected by sin. As a result, his divine life did not face any risk in his death on the cross. However, could Christ have chosen a different path? Was it possible for him to fail in his mission to save humanity? What would the consequences have been for the Son of God if so? And what implications would this have had for his divine existence?

Within the diverse landscape of theological perspectives on Christology, the contributions of Ellen White – a prominent theologian in Adventism regarded by some as a divinely-inspired prophet and a significant figure in nineteenth-century America for her influence on religion – have often been overlooked, particularly concerning her insights into the questions above. She offers a unique perspective on Christ as both the Son of Man and the Son of God, highlighting his possibility to sin and face eternal death. As a woman among the most prolific authors of the late 1800s, White delves into the potential scenario of the death of God the Son. She emphasizes that at the cross, there existed a real openness and a possibility of failure, which she refers to as the 'infinite risk.'

If, in traditional Christologies, the death of Christ, given his divine nature, was destined to succeed without any alternative ending, White's theology of infinite risk challenges this conventional assumption, suggesting that Christ's sacrifice on the cross could fail. White's view, whether fresh, innovative, or only puzzling, has profound implications for various aspects of

Christian theology, prompting to reexamine Trinitarian, Christological, and Soteriological doctrines. The idea that Christ could risk his eternal life may open up new dimensions in comprehending the profound depth of God's sacrificial love. White's views allow for a valuable, though different, exploration of Christology and its broader impact on the economy of salvation. It challenges theologians to rethink long-held assumptions and to explore the profound implications of God's infinite risk in the context of Christ's sacrifice. This may lead to gaining fresh insights into the complexity of Christ's divinity and the significance of his redemptive mission.

If Christ could sin and die forever, the dimension of God's love assumes a grandeur beyond understanding. The fact that Christ could risk his eternal divine life would shed a different light on what divinity did to save humanity. Then, the 'infinite risk' would be synonymous with 'infinite cost.' It is in these terms that White describes it when she writes that Christ "has paid so infinite a price"[1] and that "everlasting life has been purchased for man at an infinite cost."[2] In this way, she invites Christians to "stand before the cross of Calvary, and learn from it the cost of redemption"[3] and to "[r]emember that Christ risked all; 'tempted like as we are,' he staked even his own eternal existence upon the issue of the conflict. Heaven itself was imperiled for our redemption."[4] White firmly believes that there is a lack of comprehension of "the infinite risk he ventured in engaging in the great controversy in [*sic*] our behalf."[5]

Chapter 1 – Ellen White and her Infinite Risk Theology

Christology has always been one of the central doctrines of Christianity. Several questions have puzzled scholars and exegetes for centuries, such as the union of divine and human nature in the only one person of Christ as the Son of God, the implication of the Incarnation, and the question of his sacrifice and resurrection. This chapter intends to highlight the value of analysing the Christological perspective of the 'infinite risk' through the lens of White. Her contribution to the scholarly debate has not been adequately evaluated, even less her 'infinite risk' theology.

Before engaging with this specific theological concept, this chapter delineates the theological identity of White. A good starting point is to ask who White is and what White might have in mind

[1] Lt 7, 10 February 1885.

[2] "The Perfect Standard," Ms 59, 13 April 1899, para. 17.

[3] "Fragments/Work in the South," Ms 66, 28 July 1901, para. 16.

[4] "Seeking the Lost," in *General Conference Bulletin* 1 December 1895, para. 23.

[5] "The Purpose and Plan of Grace," ST 25 April 1892, para. 8.

in her context, or at least in what frame of reference the things she said and wrote were received, thus inserting her hermeneutics in a dialogical form within this theological context. This approach could aid in comprehending the extent to which White's theological positions were influenced by the traditions of her times or, at a minimum, the degree to which her writings and theological perspectives engaged with the influences of her era. This may also show where her scholarship has imported or departed from concepts of other theological doctrines. This will lead to a space where her contribution may be genuinely appreciated. Therefore, some of the implications of the infinite risk theology for Christology, and also Trinity, will be introduced in this chapter to set the foundations to evaluate White's contribution in the following ones.

Chapter 2 – White's Theological Contribution: A Comprehensive Overview

This chapter moves beyond White's exposure to other theological sources and her prophetic identity to evaluate how scholars within and outside her Adventist tradition have approached and analysed her life, ministry, writings, and theology. Although White's theology of infinite risk is intimately connected with Christological and Trinitarian doctrines, Adventist theological literature has generally overlooked it and its implications within these contexts. It is necessary here to remember that even if Trinitarian and Christological inquiries are often approached separately, they are inseparably intertwined in White's theology of infinite risk to the point that it becomes impossible to understand the risk without somehow considering both perspectives. While it is understandable that the connection between a Christological approach to the humanity of Christ and its Trinitarian implications is not always explored, the relative independence of Christ's humanity in the Incarnation is strictly linked to the 'tritheistic' shape of Trinitarian theology.

In order to discuss how Christ could take an 'infinite risk' in the Incarnation and the role played by his human nature, it is also necessary, in this chapter, to approach a general overview of some of the most relevant theological challenges, the 'peccability of Christ' and the interaction of the two natures. White's idea that the Son of God risked his life finds its sense only if he could sin. If the incarnated Son of God, Christ, is peccable (could commit sin), then he could potentially also be subjected to death, and death could be the end of his existence. This subject will also be explicitly approached from White's perspective in the next chapter. However, laying out some fertile ground for further development is essential here.

Chapter 3 – "Infinite Risk": A Contextual Hermeneutics

Throughout Christianity, the divinity and humanity of Christ have seen competing proposals that, at times, diminished one or the other. Following the numerous Christological debates around the Incarnation of the Son of God, certain orthodox boundaries have been placed in response to 'misguided' formulations. However, the long and complex debates are evidence of the difficulty of defining the relationship between the two natures. Because of this, many questions remain open beyond the Chalcedonian definition regarding the basic truth of the incarnated Son of God. In a sense, the Chalcedonian definition eliminated, to a certain degree, a number of incorrect theological arguments. Still, at the same time, it prepared the stage anew for disputes regarding the ways and means God 'became human'.

A relevant issue for the argument of the infinite risk is the apparent incongruity between divine impeccability and human temptability. White's concept that the Son of God could go out of existence is based on the idea that he could commit sin. Generally, the prominent theological position in Christianity is that Christ was sinless and could not commit sin. This concept is strengthened by the Trinitarian view of the immutability of the nature of God, which also entails the idea that the persons of the triune God may not be divisible. Therefore, the infinite risk theology calls into discussion several Christological and Trinitarian doctrines. Thus, this chapter tries to establish White's Incarnational model as the ground for her understanding of divine infinite risk and set the question in its proper place within the Christological debate.

Chapter 4 – Infinite Risk and Infinite Love

This chapter intends to analyse what lies at the basis of the idea of infinite risk in the Christology of White. Most of all, the chapter will reveal that White's theology of infinite risk has implications for how one understands the love of God and the value of humanity. Therefore, the chapter proceeds by evaluating the connection between the love of God and the risk he takes in the Incarnation. Thus, it highlights how God's love constitutes the basis of the infinite risk of Christ. At the same time, it evidences how love implies concepts such as free will, self-offering, and obedience to the Law of God, which are relevant to understanding that Christ should both be free to choose sin or not and pay the eternal consequences of the transgression of the Law. Comprehending the reason for Christ's risk will ultimately clarify that God's essence is infinite love.

The possibility of Christ committing sin and consequently going out of existence as the Son of God directly challenges the general understanding of Christ's sacrifice among mainstream theologies, which hold the concept that Christ could not sin and, therefore, his divine life was not at stake. White believes that if Christ sinned, he truly risked all to save humanity. For White, love entails the risk of pain, self-loss, and failure. This kind of love is open to fragility and, most of all, to the destabilizing and paradoxical idea of a contingent and vulnerable God. If God the Son became, in a sense, 'vulnerable' once he took human nature under the Law, was he then accountable to his own Law?

The human condition places Christ in the position of choosing or rejecting sin, transgressing or following the Law, obeying or disobeying. Could he, paradoxically, choose or reject God the Father or, even more strikingly, his own divine essence? According to White, God's infinite love somehow forced, urged, or impelled the Son of God to sacrifice himself for humanity and to be subdued to the Law's condemnation of sin. Does the Law have a Trinitarian dimension for White? If both the Law and the Incarnation may be considered a revelation of God, could the Law be understood as a sort of incarnational reality? Can the Law be considered as an ultimately eternal incarnation, an incarnation before the Incarnation? These are among the various questions discussed in this chapter, together with the idea that the Incarnation has an eternal dimension to be considered. White believes the infinite risk points to the unbreakable tie that infinite love has created between humanity and divinity. In White's view, the Incarnation is indeed an irreversible reality. In other words, Christ cannot hold his divine nature apart from the human one after the cross. Moreover, if love is at the basis of the risk Christ had to face, this would require thinking of him as a free agent, able to make choices based on love because, without risk, there is no freedom nor love; without a risking God, there may not be a loving God, thus risk and love belong together.

Chapter 5 – Infinite Risk and Infinite Value/Cost

The chapter considers that this infinite love of God implied a cost proportionate to the value God gave to each soul. The infinite risk Christ assumed and freely chose in the Incarnation came at an infinite cost because he gave an infinite value to humanity. Thus, it becomes necessary to discuss the main implications of the idea of infinite risk for the broader soteriological and eschatological theology of White. Therefore, this chapter draws directly from the language White uses to discuss the point of infinite risk by pairing it with terms such as 'value', 'cost', 'expense', and others within

this semantic field. White's 'infinite theological language' expresses the relationship between the 'cost' of Christ's death and the 'value' of human beings. Infinite gain and infinite blessing will result from an infinite risk taken because of infinite love.

Moreover, this chapter takes a closer look at the concept of infinite risk and its implications for the idea of sacrifice, the death of God, and, most of all, the resurrection. White sees this latter as a probability, not an assurance because a closed tomb has been a real risk. Other related questions also find space in this part of the thesis, leading to a concluding moment for final reflections on White's theology of infinite risk.

Chapter 6 – An Inexplicable Risk

The final chapter summarises the broader range of challenges of the theological concept of 'infinite risk' and how White's theology meets these challenges, driven by the understanding of the Incarnation as an irreversible process where both natures are mutually influencing each other. It also aims to explain the relevance of thinking of the Son of God risking his eternal existence to save humanity as evidence of God's love. It encourages a reconsideration of the cross, its implications, the Resurrection, and even the Incarnation itself, given the possibility of an alternative scenario. The chapter also offers a space to think about the experience of the cross as if it were the last moment of Christ's life and the rupture of the relationship between Father and Son. It raises questions about a human or divine sacrifice as a necessity to the redeeming act and the consequences of the death of divinity. Ultimately, becoming flesh remains an inexplicable risk, but reasoning with White about what (could have) happened at the cross highlights the potentials and opportunities of paradoxically measuring the 'infinity' of God and of his love through what White calls an 'infinite sacrifice' done with an 'infinite risk' in view.

Abbreviations (primary sources of Ellen G. White's writings cited)

AA	Acts of the Apostles, The
1BC	Bible Commentary, The Seventh-Day Adventist, Vol. 1 (2BC for Vol. 2, etc.)
BE	Bible Echo
CE	Christian Education
COL	Christ's Object Lessons
Con	Confrontation
CS	Counsels on Stewardship
CT	Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students
CTBH	Christian Temperance and Bible Hygiene
DA	Desire of Ages, The
EW	Early Writings
FE	Fundamentals of Christian Education
GC88	Great Controversy, The (1888 Edition)
GW92	Gospel Workers (1892 edition)
GW	Gospel Workers
HP	In Heavenly Places
HS	Historical Sketches of the Foreign Missions of the Seventh-day Adventists
Lt	Letter, E. G. White
1LtMs	Letters and Manuscripts, Vol. 1 (2LtMs for Vol. 2, etc.)
MB	Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing
MH	Ministry of Healing, The
1MR	Manuscript Releases, Vol. 1 (2MR for Vol. 2, etc.)
Ms	Manuscript, E. G. White
PP	Patriarchs and Prophets
RH	Review and Herald
SC	Steps to Christ
1SG	Spiritual Gifts, Vol. 1 (2SG for Vol. 2, etc.)
1SM	Selected Messages, Book One (2SM for Book 2, etc.)
1SP	Spirit of Prophecy, The, Vol. 1 (2SP for Vol. 2, etc.)
SpTEd	Special Testimonies on Education
ST	Signs of the Times
1T	Testimonies for the Church Vol. 1 (2T for Vol. 2, etc.)
TM	Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers
YI	Youth's Instructor, The

Chapter 1

Ellen White and her Infinite Risk Theology

1.1 What is "Infinite Risk Theology"?

Christians believe that Christ,[6] as the incarnate Son of God, died for the sins of the world. However, could the story have unfolded differently? Could Christ have sinned and faced eternal death? Could there have been a Gospel without a resurrection narrative? Would the tomb have remained sealed if Christ had sinned? Could the Son of God have been permanently separated from communion with the Father? If Christ were incapable of sinning, there would not have been a potential risk to his life. This is where the question finds its *raison d'être*: Was there a possibility for the divine Son of God, Christ, to sin and face the consequences as any human being would? In other words, could the divine Son of God have risked his eternal life, forever losing himself or ceasing to exist? This question is rarely considered or discussed, and the intriguing dilemma is often overlooked, underestimated, or even neglected in Christological debates.

Most Christian authors have held the view that the human will of Christ operated in a manner where the outcome of his mission was almost predetermined. There is widespread agreement in Christology, albeit with varying nuances, that Christ could not change in his divine nature (immutability), and he is 'indivisible' from the triune God. Furthermore, it is widely argued that Christ could not sin (impeccability) and that his free will remained unaffected by sin. As a result, his divine life did not face any risk in his crucifixion and death on the cross. However, could Christ have chosen a different path? Was it possible for him to fail in his mission to save humanity? What would the consequences have been for the Son of God if so? And what implications would this have had for his divine existence?

Within the diverse landscape of theological perspectives on Christology, the contributions of Ellen Gould White (1827-1915) – a prominent theologian in Adventism regarded by some as a divinely-inspired prophet and a significant figure in nineteenth-century America for her influence on religion – have often been overlooked, particularly concerning her insights into the questions above. She offers a unique perspective on Christ as both the Son of Man and the Son of God, highlighting his possibility to sin and face eternal death. As a woman among the most prolific authors

[6] If no other specification is given, I use 'Christ' consistently to refer to his incarnated person, divine and human. This will be further clarified in the text.

of the late 1800s, White delves into the potential scenario of the death of God the Son. She emphasizes that at the cross, there existed a real openness and a possibility of failure, which she refers to as the 'infinite risk.' White addresses this theological concept throughout her writings, with specific statements standing out and warranting repeated mention and analysis. One such emblematic statement that exemplifies the essence of this investigation is as follows: "Remember that Christ risked all; 'tempted like as we are,' he staked even his own eternal existence upon the issue of the conflict. Heaven itself was imperiled for our redemption."[7] White firmly believes that "we do not comprehend the infinite condescension of Christ in consenting to war with the enemy, or the infinite risk he ventured in engaging in the great controversy in [*sic*] our behalf."[8]

If, in traditional Christologies, the death of Christ, given his divine nature, was destined to succeed without any alternative ending, the concept this analysis termed 'theology of infinite risk' – as articulated by White – challenges this conventional assumption, suggesting that Christ's sacrifice on the cross could fail. White's theology of infinite risk, whether fresh, innovative, or only puzzling, has profound implications for various aspects of Christian theology, prompting to reexamine Trinitarian, Christological, and Soteriological doctrines. The idea that Christ could risk his eternal life may open up new dimensions in comprehending the profound depth of God's sacrificial love. White's views allow for a valuable, though different, exploration of Christology and its broader impact on the economy of salvation. It challenges theologians to rethink long-held assumptions and to explore the profound implications of God's infinite risk in the context of Christ's sacrifice. This may lead to gaining fresh insights into the complexity of Christ's divinity and the significance of his redemptive mission.

It is worth noting that there has been valuable research on White from different perspectives, although not specifically focused on her theology of infinite risk. Previous research within Adventism has explored various aspects of White's theological views, albeit not delving into the implications of her belief in the eternal death of the Son of God. Surprisingly, no research has been conducted within or outside of Adventism specifically addressing this idea. While conducting a focused examination of certain Trinitarian and Christological perspectives is necessary, this research does

[7] "Seeking the Lost," in *General Conference Bulletin* 1 December 1895, para. 23. This was a week of prayer meditation pointing Adventists around the world to the question of the risk implied in Christ's sacrifice (the statement has been republished and at times elaborated, as in ST 9 June 1898; 1SM, 256; COL, 198; specific reference will be noted for each occurrence in this work).

[8] "The Purpose and Plan of Grace," ST 25 April 1892, para. 8.

not primarily aim to dissect White's views on these doctrinal areas. The main objective is to elucidate White's conception of what she terms 'infinite risk' and its broader implications for her theology.

This introductory chapter aims to provide an overview of key ideas expressed by White and underscore the significance of analysing the Christological perspective of 'infinite risk theology' through her lens. Additionally, this chapter will present an initial exploration of the theological questions and challenges inherent in the concept of Christ risking his divine life. To accomplish this, I will first examine White's life, theology, hermeneutics, and identity to lay the groundwork for discussing the concept of 'infinite risk'. The chapter will also investigate the theological endeavours undertaken within White's Adventist tradition in Trinitarian and Christological views. This exploration is crucial for comprehending the theological framework within which White operated and the evolution of her specific views on the subject. This examination will involve considering her stances in relation to mainstream Trinitarian and Chalcedonian views, particularly concerning the person of Christ within the Trinity. Understanding her theological positions and identity will provide insights into her perspectives on the potential death of the Son of God.

White's writings emphasize the profound nature of Christ's sacrifice and the extent of his redemptive work, encompassing his death as a divine being. She posits that Christ willingly assumed the sins of the entire world, shouldering the burden of humanity's transgressions. Within the framework of infinite risk, she articulates the idea that,

> Christ bore the sins of the whole world. He endured our punishment—the wrath of God against transgression. His trial involved the fierce temptation of thinking that He was forsaken by God. His soul was tortured by the pressure of a horror of great darkness lest He should swerve from His uprightness during the terrible ordeal. He could not have been tempted in all points like as man is tempted had there been no possibility of His failing. He was a free agent, placed on probation, as was Adam and as is man.[9]

As White clarifies, one of the temptations Christ faced was the overwhelming sense of abandonment by God. This profound experience of feeling forsaken intensified his suffering and demonstrated the extent to which he identified with the human condition. White further underscores that Christ's trial encompassed the genuine possibility of succumbing to temptation.

[9] "Sacrificed for Us," Ms 29, 17 March 1899.

As a free agent, Christ was subject to probation, similar to Adam and all of humanity. In other words, he possessed the freedom to choose and the potential to fail in obeying God's will. Hence, Christ confronted the inherent risk of swerving from his uprightness.

Thus, it becomes evident that navigating the intricacies of White's theology of infinite risk requires a systematic approach, prompting the question of how to methodically unravel its complexities. The answer to this question is not intuitive. This complexity emerges from the profound theological implication that Christ, despite his divine nature, faced an authentic risk. Consequently, some preliminary perspectives and conceptual frameworks may be valuable at this point.

1.1.1 Probing Infinite Risk: Preliminary Perspectives and Conceptual Frameworks

The extensive thematic range of White's writings may pose a challenge in terms of systematic and coherent analysis due especially to the diverse array of subjects she has addressed. However, the content of this introductory chapter, along with this section and the valuable discussions of the following chapter on White's theological contribution, significantly contribute to providing preliminary perspectives and conceptual frameworks essential to articulate the systematic approach employed in the analysis of White's theology of infinite risk.

The structure progresses to include a comprehensive literature review, providing an overview of the existing scholarly landscape related to White's theological contributions. In order to establish a solid foundation, the analysis attempts to capture the essence of her writings and incorporate a detailed exploration of the specific texts that directly engage with the concept of infinite risk. It delves into a biographical examination, shedding light on White's identity, including her recognition as a prophetess. However, this focused examination serves to elucidate the intricacies and nuances of White's theology within this specific context, diverging from a comprehensive examination of White's prophetic ministry to prioritize a theological and interpretative concentration on her concept of 'infinite risk', though connected as necessary to her theological and socio-historical milieu. For this reason, certain aspects of the discussion transcend the confines of the main text, extending into the comprehensive apparatus of footnotes where additional layers of information are provided.

This research aims to offer a coherent and comprehensive analysis, ensuring a seamless flow from the methodological approach to the intricate exploration of White's theology and its implications on traditional theological concepts. Thus, the methodology employed in this work involves a multifaceted approach to comprehensively explore and evaluate White's theology of infinite risk by contextualizing her theological contributions within her socio-historical and religious milieu and emphasizing specific texts related to Christology and the theology of infinite risk. Furthermore, the structure facilitates an in-depth exploration of how White's infinite risk theology challenges conventional theological paradigms, acknowledging the potential reciprocal challenges posed by established theological frameworks. Special attention is necessarily given to exploring possible points of tension between her views and mainstream theological perspectives, especially Christological and Trinitarian doctrines, but also Soteriological ones. The implications of White's theology of infinite risk transcend the boundaries of these theological frameworks, beckoning theologians to reassess and potentially recalibrate entrenched doctrines. This analysis implicitly assesses the theological implications and ramifications of accepting or challenging traditional doctrinal and theological positions.

Consequently, identifying recurring themes, theological nuances and language, and unique perspectives embedded in her writings, and examining the specific theological exigencies that lead White to explore the possibility of Christ risking eternal life, constitute an integral element of this analysis. This inclusively establishes the connection between biographical, textual, and theological analyses, demonstrating their interdependence.

The study also navigates the delicate balance between interpretive analysis of White's theology and constructive exploration of its implications for dogmatics. This is done by dialogically engaging with existing scholarship, also within the Adventist tradition, that can address White's theological contributions, especially in relation to the concept of infinite risk. However, while research on White has been undertaken from various angles, the specific focus on her theology of infinite risk remains conspicuously absent within and outside Adventism. Therefore, this study seeks to address this discernible and persistent lacuna, aiming not to dissect her views within established doctrinal frameworks but to illuminate and comprehensively understand White's distinctive concept of 'infinite risk' and the profound implications it holds for the broader theological landscape.

A critical examination of White's library is also relevant to identify texts that could have informed her theology of infinite risk. In traversing this terrain, I seek not only to comprehend White's

theology but also to appreciate the intellectual landscape that nurtured her ideas. This contextual approach may be vital for discerning the origins and implications of her theology of infinite risk and unveiling the intricate interplay between this enigmatic concept and her prophetic identity and theological context.

As previously expounded and succinctly underscored here, the prevailing theological notion within the extensive spectrum of traditional Christologies asserts the deterministic trajectory of Christ's mission — a preordained course shielded by divine immutability, impeccability, and indivisibility. The Christian narrative revolves around the belief that Christ, as the incarnate Son of God, sacrificed himself for the sins of humanity. Yet, amidst this theological certainty, the provocative question in discussion is: Could Christ, ensconced in his divine nature, have confronted the risk of succumbing to sin and, by extension, faced eternal death? This incisive inquiry forms the poignant essence of what the term 'Infinite Risk Theology' means. It is a question seldom broached, yet one that resounds with existential gravity. The core premise hinges on the contemplation of whether the divine Son of God, Christ, possessed the conceivable capacity to traverse the precipice of sin, thereby risking eternal forfeiture—dissolution into nonexistence. This inquiry is the keystone of this investigation and undergirds the nascent construct of 'Infinite Risk Theology,' a conceptual framework that urges to reimagine the contours of 'divine vulnerability'.

Therefore, by adhering to this comprehensive methodological framework, this research aims to provide a rigorous and nuanced exploration of White's theology of infinite risk, contributing to the broader discourse on Christology. White's insights introduce a distinctive perspective—one that transcends the confines of conventional theological paradigms. It is an exploration into the profound potentiality of Christ daring to risk eternal life.

However, before an in-depth exploration of White's theology of infinite risk, it becomes imperative to contextualize her life, theology, and hermeneutical approach. This multifaceted understanding involves situating White within the unique tapestry of her socio-historical context and Christian experience and discerning her theological framework in relation to mainstream Trinitarian and Christological views. A comprehensive understanding of White is challenging without insights into her upbringing, life experiences, and work. It is crucial to delineate White's theological identity to appreciate the nuances of White's concept of infinite risk and its related ideas. This is made more evident by outlining the context in which White's view crystallized.

1.2. Who is Ellen White?

Ellen Gould Harmon, known more widely by her married surname 'White', was a prolific author and religious figure in nineteenth-century America (1827-1915).[10] Her writings played a role in forming and developing Seventh-Day Adventist tradition and theology.[11] Over 5,000 periodical

[10] Arthur L. White (1907–1991), one of Ellen White's grandchildren, a writer and theology professor, produced a six-volume biography of his grandmother entitled, *Ellen G. White: A Biography* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1981-1986). A shorter edition is also now available as Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White - A Brief Biography* (Washington, D.C.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1985). Another abridgement of the six-volume biography written by Arthur L. White, is the book *Ellen White: Woman of Vision* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2001). Arthur L. White served as the director of the Ellen White archives and had extensive knowledge of Ellen's life and literary legacy. Virtually, almost every book or article dealing with Ellen G White has a biographical section which reflects the need of both contextualizing her writings and informing the readers about a less-known figure.
See also the recent volume by Terrie Dopp Aamodt, Gary Land, and Ronald L. Numbers, *Ellen Harmon White: American Prophet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). In the "Foreword" of this book and in the chapter titled "A Portrait", White's theology and life is framed in history and theology in nineteen century America. The chapters titled "Visions" and "Prophet" discuss the self-awareness of White as someone who has received direct messages from God to be communicated to others. White never called herself a prophet and she took steps away from fanatic movements, visionaries, and those practicing Mesmerism or other form of spiritual phenomena. The book tries to contextualise, from a historiographical perspective, the life and work of Ellen G. White. It does it by discussing if her writings and ministry may have been received whether as an authoritative interpretation of the Bible or as a direct revelation from the mouth of God. See also Ronald L. Numbers, *Prophetess of Health: A Study of Ellen G. White* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1976); Roy E. Graham, *Ellen G. White, Co-Founder of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church* (New York, NY: P. Lang, 1985).
Certainly, a very relevant source is also *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia* edited by Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2013), which contains hundreds of comprehensive articles, richly referenced, covering a spectrum of topics ranging from her doctrinal positions to her views on health and lifestyle, and describing people, places, and events in the life of Ellen G White. This resource encompasses a detailed chronology of her life, along with extensive articles addressing various facets of her ministry, theology, and pronouncements in the context of evolving scientific understanding.

[11] For a more comprehensive introduction to Seventh-Day Adventism, valuable resources may include, but are not limited to, Isaac Wellcome, *History of the Second Advent Message* (Boston, MA: Advent Christian Publication Society, 1874); Arthur W. Spalding, *Origin and History of Seventh-day Adventists* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1961); Arthur L. White, *The Ellen G. White Writings* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1973); Edwin S. Gaustad (ed.), *The Rise of Adventism: Religion and Society in Mid-nineteenth-century America* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1974); Mervyn C. Maxwell, *Tell It to the World*: *The Story of Seventh-Day Adventists* (second revision; Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1982); Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-Day Adventism and the American Dream* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1989); Ronald L. Numbers, *Prophetess of Health: Ellen G. White and the Origins of Seventh-Day Adventist Health Reform* (rev. ed.; Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1992); Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler (eds.), *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1993); George R. Knight, *Millennial Fever and the End of the World* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1993); Gary Land (ed.), *Adventism in America* (rev. ed.; Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1998); Richard W. Schwarz, and Floyd Greenleaf, *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2000); Douglas Morgan, *Adventism and the American Republic* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2001); Gary Land, *The A to Z of the Seventh-Day Adventists* (Plymouth: The Scarecrow Press, 2009). This non-exhaustive list of relevant contributions includes books that offer in-depth insights into the life of Ellen G. White and the broader Adventist

articles and 40 books (24 before her death and the others published after) constitute her theological legacy.[12] What makes her an interesting writer is also the broad range of topics that are addressed in her writings, such as biblical studies, theology, religion, social life and relationships, civil rights and equality, evangelism, ecology, nutrition and health, education, counselling, and even management, to include some.

Raised in a Methodist tradition,[13] which she was forced to leave, she followed the teaching of William Miller (1782-1849) about the second coming of Christ. She married a minister of the Christian Connection, James White, a movement relying strongly on the sole authority of the Bible clustered around various theological concepts, at times close to Arminian theology. While experiencing early widowhood, frail health, the loss of two of her four children, and more than 2,000 dreams and visions that framed her as a prophetic figure in Adventism, White held a worldview of the mission of Christianity and kept an active publishing agenda.[14] She wrote for Christians, explicitly

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tradition, providing a comprehensive overview of Seventh-Day Adventist history and beliefs. These sources can serve as supplementary readings to enhance the understanding of the cultural and theological context surrounding Ellen G. White's contributions. Another valuable source is the online edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Seventh-day Adventists* (https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/). Other links to digital material on Adventism and Ellen G. White are provided in the discussion of this research and the bibliography.

[12] Today there exist an extensive recompilation of White's writings and the publication of new editions, topic-volumes, devotionals, and more. Interest in the work of White makes her the most translated woman writer in the history of literature (more than 140 languages), and certainly the most translated author in America.

[13] Methodism traces its origins to the 18th-century revivalist movement led by John Wesley (1703-1791) and his brother Charles Wesley (1707-1788). It emerged as a distinct theological and ecclesiastical tradition, characterized by a focus on personal piety, social justice, and evangelical zeal. For further studies in the Methodist traditions see Stephen Tomkins, *John Wesley: A Biography* (Oxford: Lion Publishing, 2003). This biography offers a detailed exploration of John Wesley's life, theology, and the founding principles of Methodism. It provides insights into Wesley's theological development and the early years of the Methodist movement. See also Charles Yrigoyen Jr. and Susan E. Warrick, *The Methodists* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999) for a comprehensive overview of the history, beliefs, and practices of Methodism. The book covers key events, influential figures, and the evolution of Methodism from its beginnings to the present day. Another source focusing on John Wesley's role and the broader Methodist movement, delving into the theological foundations and organizational structures that shaped Methodism, is *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* by Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995). For more studies on the development of Methodism in the United States, its impact on American religious and social history, and the challenges, successes, and adaptations of Methodism within the American context, see *American Methodism: A Compact History,* by Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2012). Finally, David Hempton's *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* offers an in-depth analysis of Methodism as a global phenomenon. It explores the spread of Methodism across continents, examining its interactions with various cultures and its role in shaping a global religious landscape (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005).
These references collectively provide a solid foundation for understanding the historical, theological, and social dimensions of the period in which White lived and worked.

[14] The list of selected sources presented herein attests to the expansive yet intricate nature of investigating her prophetic calling and persona. These scholarly works discuss diverse viewpoints concerning the prophetic role of White,

addressing church members at both the individual and collective levels. Although she engaged with a wide range of theological issues and ideas, her approach was not that of an academic exercise.

She wrote within a framework relying on the historical and theological sources available but developing a critically significant and different scholarship. Her hermeneutics was not a work of textual criticism, exegetical-grammar insight or philosophical reasoning; nevertheless, a thorough analysis of her writings may highlight her Biblical epistemology, theological understanding of God, anthropological comprehension of humanity, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology. However, her main focus was always that of a soteriologically-oriented theological instruction of parenetical value, focused on a close reading of the biblical text.[15]

She was not an academically trained scholar of the Bible or a theologian.[16] However, her commentaries and specific volumes on both the Old and New Testament, Christian education,

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encompassing historical and critical examinations of her life and literary contributions. They offer insights into her reception as a prophetess and capture the essence of White's entire body of writings. However, it is relevant to note that the present analysis, centring on the theological construct of 'infinite risk,' may necessarily diverge from an exhaustive exploration of White's prophetic ministry and identity, acknowledging the multifaceted nature of her scholarly discourse. Further resources are used throughout this investigation and summarised in the Bibliography. See Housel T. Jemison, *A Prophet Among You* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1955); Denton E. Rebok, *Believe His Prophets* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1956); Roger W. Coon, *A Gift of Light* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1983); Roger W. Coon, *Heralds of New Light: Another Prophet to the Remnant?* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1987); Kenneth H. Wood, *The Gift of Prophecy in the Advent Movement: A Study in Historical and Prophetic Accuracy* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1993); Herbert Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord: The Prophetic Ministry of Ellen White* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1998); George R. Knight, *Walking with Ellen White: The Human Interest Story* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1999); Leonard Brand, and Don S. McMahon, *The Prophet and Her Critics* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2005); Jud Lake, *Ellen White Under Fire: Identifying the Mistakes of Her Critics* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2010).

Moreover, see also David F. Holland, "American Visionaries and Their Approaches to the Past," in *Approaching Antiquity: Joseph Smith and the Ancient World* (eds. Lincoln H. Blumell, Matthew J. Grey, and Andrew H. Hedges; Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015), 23–60. This essay explores the approaches to the past adopted by three prominent American figures of the era—Mary Baker Eddy, Joseph Smith, and Ellen White. While these figures are incomparable in many aspects, their juxtaposition unveils significant implications emanating from their engagements with sacred history. Holland is also currently working on a comparative biography titled *A Particular Universe: Ellen Gould White, Mary Baker Eddy and the Nineteenth Century United States*, to be published by Yale University Press.

[15] Her commitment to the Bible is exemplified by the last words she uttered before the Seventh Day Adventist General Conference assembly in Washington, in 1909, just six years prior to her death and while sharing her faith in Christ's return, "Brethren and sisters, I commend unto you this Book." Ruth Wheeler, *His Messenger* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1939), 180.

[16] Besides letters, articles, and books to encourage, counsel, and reproach church members and leaders, she also engaged in social actions in favour of people in need or abused. White believed in the centrality of the revelation of the person of Christ in Scriptures as the basis to remediate all of society's injustices. She dealt with issues of equality,

Christian ethics, health, social and family life, spirituality, and Christian history, remain valuable evidence of her scholarship. Moreover, she was in contact with extensive literature available at her time, obviously to a certain degree that may not be fully established. This is proved by her private and office library that, at the end of her life, contained numerous books and volumes of various authors on biblical and theological studies, ethical and social issues, health, dictionaries, encyclopaedias, and more, for a total of more than one thousand five hundred references. [17]

Her theological insight expanded systematically through the challenges generated by others' views. Consequently, she holistically developed herself in line with some contemporary approaches to biblical studies, generally a theological hermeneutics of Scripture, often devoid of elaborated theological jargon. Her theology was a Christo-centric one, as the Adventist historian Knight writes, saying that "in the mind of Ellen White, the life of Jesus, His death on the cross, His ministry in applying the merits of His death in the heavenly sanctuary, and the acceptance of Christ's work by the believer through faith stands as a great thematic cluster at the center of her understanding of Christianity. Nothing was more important to her than that intimately related complex of idea."[18] Certainly, the frame of reference in which her positions should be inserted is that of the Adventist movement. However, since many of those who gave birth to the Adventist tradition came from various evangelical backgrounds present in late nineteenth-century America, different theological traditions may concur in shaping the theological context and sources that created the basis for White's biblical hermeneutics. [19]

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individual rights, and inclusiveness. Throughout her extensive theological contribution, she engaged with racial equality, mistreatment and abuse of fellow humans, child adoption, sexual harassment, bullying, and social equality. She discussed questions such as respect for animals, creation of safe environments for all people and workers, medical support for disadvantaged populations, fairness in trades, and environmental health. She talked also of working to enact fair legislation, being the voice of the voiceless, helping foreigners and refugees, and aiding single mothers. She protested against political injustice, physical and psychological abuse. She recognized the spiritual nature of social oppression and considers Christian values as a solution to all forms of social evil.

[17] See Warren H. Johns, Tim Poirier, and Ron Graybill (comp.), *A Bibliography of Ellen G. White's Private And Office Libraries*, (Washington, D.C.: Ellen G. White Estate, Third Revised Edition, April 1993). See also Denis Kaiser "How Ellen White Did Her Writing" in Merlin D. Burt (ed.), *Understanding Ellen White: The Life and Work of the Most Influential Voice in Adventist History* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2015), 118-132.

[18] George R. Knight, *Meeting Ellen White: A Fresh Look at Her Life, Writings, and Major Themes* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1996), 115.

[19] See Knight, *Meeting Ellen White*. Knight talks of important themes of White's biography and theology such as the centrality of Christ and the Bible, and the science of salvation (see esp. pp.113-116).

White's theological positions may follow these concurring traditions leading to the formation of the Adventist church, but at the same time, she adopts new and original ideas. Thus, her voice is inserted in a context of dialogue influenced by the theological traditions of those who founded Adventism, therefore of evangelical Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians, with influences – in general – Calvinist and Arminian (classical) of a certain type, but certainly linked to a much earlier and broader Protestant tradition. Thus, a contextualized comparison may better explain White's theological positions and offer a basis for inserting her views into the wider Christological debate. This contextualized approach avoids the development of an extrinsic comparison made between authors or theologians who have no specific point of contact beyond discussing similar arguments. This conceptual-contextualized framework becomes crucial to explaining and understanding White's infinite risk theology. Therefore, it becomes relevant at this stage to focus on the theological 'atmosphere' in which White breathed and consequently to her hermeneutic approach. This helps understand how to frame her concept of infinite risk within her theological understanding of Christ's divine and human natures.

A good starting point is to evaluate the context in which White's statements and writings were received. This approach allows us to place her hermeneutics in a dialogical form within the theological context of her time. Furthermore, it enables us to gauge the extent to which White's theological positions were influenced by the traditions of her era or, at the very least, the ideas with which her writings and theological perspectives intersected. This may be done by analysing White's theology and theological background and showing the link between the context for White's theology of infinite risk and her understanding of the nature of Christ and his sacrifice.

Her library is crucial for understanding the available sources and theological partners with which her theology could have interacted or come in touch. At the same time, reconstructing her thoughts from the numerous fragmentary Christological statements in her writings may avoid the development of unrelated comparisons or extraneous to her context. It may demonstrate how her viewpoints are part of the wider Christological debate. This may also show where her scholarship has imported, or departed from, concepts of other theological doctrines. This will lead to a space where her contribution within her theological context, and to scholarship today, may be truly appreciated. This will set the foundations to evaluate in the following chapters what happened or could have happened at the cross if the Son of God had sinned, and prepare the reader to engage with White's Christology. Consequently, the following section endeavours to explore what

constitutes the context for White's theology of infinite risk by paying attention, especially but not exclusively to two elements: her exposure to other theological sources and her prophetic identity.

1.2.1 Infinite Risk: Theological Context and Prophetic Identity

In order to understand White's theological positions on the question of Christ's infinite risk, it makes sense to analyse them within her historical context. This becomes even more precise if limited to the theological context she was confronted with, primarily represented by the material available to her. Her library, therefore, becomes a relevant source of information. Consequently, in reviewing the writings authored by White, one would need to proceed with some presuppositions such as, among others, that White was considered a prophet within the Adventist tradition, that her writing revealed primarily a concern for the church, that her effort to develop an understanding of Scripture was not exhaustive, and that she was somewhat impacted by time as well as other authors that were active during the period she wrote.

This section focuses specifically on authors who published their works before Ellen White's death (1915), with a particular emphasis, although not exclusively, on non-Adventist writers. This section may not be exhaustive because other sources published before 1900 and not part of her library could have indirectly influenced her writing if she had read them. However, for the sake of this study, an evaluation of the writers who were accessible to her in her libraries can already constitute a relevant basis for understanding her theology. While it is true that the cut-off point may be arbitrary, White's theological inclinations, as well as her educational and religious background and context, determine the literature that most likely impacted her.

Therefore, at this stage, it is necessary to make a selection based mainly on the books that White might have indeed used, whether because her handwriting is found on them or because of the evidence of literary parallels. Moreover, together with biblical and theological studies, there are volumes on ethical and social issues, health, dictionaries, encyclopaedias, and other texts that may or may not have been linked explicitly to White's theology of infinite risk. Consequently, it makes sense to delimit this survey to the texts that could more reliably be the partners in White's theological discourse on God's risk.

After a thorough analysis based on the criteria mentioned above, the results of which would go beyond the scope and limits of this work, only a very limited number of books would address

theological questions associated with the question of risk.[20] An overview of relevant books, potentially exerting a literary influence on White's infinite risk theology, is here valuable. This contextual approach helps understand her unique perspective and avoids comparing theologians on unrelated themes. This is crucial for comprehending her theology of infinite risk.

An interesting text worth considering is Charles Beecher's (1815-1900) book, *Redeemer and Redeemed*: *An Investigation of the Atonement and of Eternal Judgment* (1864). A prominent American preacher and prolific author, Beecher faced controversy due to his anti-orthodox teachings, leading to his removal from a Congregational Church in 1863. He believed that Christ's sufferings had solely a moral rather than a vicarious atoning purpose. Most interestingly, he argued for a doctrine of divine Sorrow against the idea that God was impassible and unchangeable. He believed that God had variable passions and that Christ was not merely the second person of the Trinity but rather an angel with the divinity of the second person and a human body.[21]

His ideas of a changeable and passible God and the discovered idea that Christ could be punished "in full"[22] for the sins of humanity may have found some sort of resonance, though limited, in White's theology.[23] He sees divinity in Christ as a form of "close spiritual likeness" and Christ as the man of sorrow and God's "most expressive representative."[24] He assumes that in some form, the death of Christ is illustrative of the Divine sorrow, and he expresses it using a language common to

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[20] Among the books dealing broadly with the topic of Christ's sacrifice, his death or his power over it, and other related topics, the following ones could have been of interest to White for her theology of infinite risk (however not all offering any specific ground for the topic): James B. Walker, *Philosophy of the Plan of Salvation* (New York, NY: M. W. Dodd & R. Carter, 1843); William Hanna, *The Life of Christ* (New York, NY: Amer. Tract Soc., 1863); Charles Beecher, *Redeemer and Redeemed*: *An Investigation of the Atonement and of Eternal Judgment* (Boston, MA: Lee and Shepard, 1864); William S. Plumer, *The Rock of Our Salvation: A Treatise Respecting the Natures, Person, Offices, Work, Sufferings, and Glory of Jesus Christ* (New York, NY: Amer. Tract Soc., 1867); Hugh MacMillan, *Our Lord's Three Raisings from the Dead* (Glasgow: James MacLehose, 1876); Daniel March, *Days of the Son of Man* (Philadelphia, PA: J. C. McCurdy & Co, 1885); John Hall, *The Earthly Footprints of our Risen Lord* (New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell Co, 1891); Stephen N. Haskell, *The Cross and Its Shadow* (South Lancaster, MA: The Bible Training School, 1914).

[21] "It seems to us that several doctrines preached by our pastor, Rev. Mr. Beecher, are not in accordance with the faith since delivered to the saints and held generally by the churches in New England, viz: 'The doctrine of fore existence of the human soul - of the atonement - of the state of souls after death, and of divine Sorrow.'" *Michigan Argus*, 24 July 1863, "Trial Of Rev. Charles Beecher For Heresy" (available at https://aadl.org/node/279441 [retrieved August 2023]). See also *The Boston Journal*, 26 July 1863, "The Trial of Rev. Charles Beecher", p.5, (available at https://www.nytimes.com/1863/07/26/archives/the-trial-of-rev-charles-beecher-he-is-convicted-of-heresy-result.html [retrieved August 2023]).

[22] Beecher, *Redeemer and Redeemed*, viii.

[23] See ch. 3 especially in reference to God's im/mutability.

[24] Beecher, *Redeemer and Redeemed*, 268.

White, the language of 'infinite'.[25] He supports Calvin's belief that Christ "suffered in his soul the dreadful torments of a person condemned and irretrievably lost,"[26] which would find further elaboration in White's theology of infinite risk. He also reports Socinus' view that "the idea that both justice and mercy are exhibited in salvation is plainly ridiculous, and can by no means be established; for mercy demands that the sinner be freely forgiven, but justice demands that those who have sinned be punished . . . Nay, verily Christ did not suffer eternal death, and woe be to us if he had!"[27]

What is worth highlighting is how Beecher's argumentation explores the idea that Christ did not suffer eternal death, while 'probably' he could, thus touching on questions close to White's theology of infinite risk with some common language and similar questions. Whether she was indebted to, or only prompted by, Beecher to think about God subjected to suffering and change would be difficult to prove. She was most undoubtedly selective in not accepting Beecher's entire approach and certainly eclectic in accommodating another's views to finalise her own model.

William Hanna (1808-1882), a Scottish minister and theologian linked firstly to the Church of Scotland, then the Free Church of Scotland, and eventually the Mission Church at the Pleasance, wrote a book titled *The Life of Christ* (1863) resembling in structure one of White's most relevant texts for her theology of infinite risk, *The Desire of Ages* (1898). Both books intended to comment on the entire life of Christ told in the Gospel. In the chapter titled "The Temptation," Hanna talks of Christ's sinless humanity secured by the work of the Holy Spirit. Most of all, his approach to the experience of Christ with Satan's temptations is focused on the idea that Satan believed he could shake Christ's trust and confidence in his Father. Moreover, Hanna portrays the scenario of Christ's falling to the temptation of the world's kingdoms and honours. He asserts that Satan thought that

> even the Son of God himself might have fallen before the dazzling temptation. Had he done so, Satan would indeed have triumphed; for putting wholly out of the question the violated relationship to the Father, Jesus would thus have renounced all the purely moral and religious purposes of his mission — would have ceased to be regarded as the author of a spiritual revolution, and the founder of a spiritual kingdom, affecting myriads of human spirits from

[25] "[…] the mighty lesson designed to be taught us, as with infinite appeal, is the lesson of a sorrow not human merely, but Divine, a grief not of any mere finite sufferer, but of an infinite; an anguish and a woe not of a mere created victim, but of an uncreated Ransom, whose expiation, like his suffering, might be infinite." Beecher, *Redeemer and Redeemed*, 269. The language of 'infinite' is very much present also in March, *Days of the Son of Man.*

[26] Beecher, *Redeemer and Redeemed*, 16.

[27] Ibid., 269.

the beginning to the end of time, and would thenceforth have taken up the character of a mere vulgar earthly monarch.[28]

This potential scenario, though presented as Satan's conjecture, indeed finds strong resonance in White's writings, especially in reference to what Satan thought to be able to do, as it will be shown later in this work. Even if Hanna seems to hold an "exemplarist" view of Christ – as he could fall from being an example for others – and does not elaborate further in reference to a potential death of the Son of God, he actually describes a situation where Christ could have lost much of his divine characteristics, such as violating the relationship with the Father, renouncing to the moral and religious purposes of his mission, ceasing to be the Saviour and taking up the character of a "mere vulgar earthly monarch". This description may imply or facilitate a further conclusion: the death of the Son of God. It is reasonable to assume that White could have developed some of these potential scenarios into a concrete reality.

The Cross and its Shadow, published in 1914 by Stephen N. Haskell (1833-1922), may not be considered directly a source for White's theology of infinite risk. However, while there is no way to evaluate if Haskell could have influenced White at an earlier stage, his book may reveal at least an ongoing discussion on the topic or its reception. He was significantly committed to the mission of the Adventist church, and his book is a careful Christological interpretation of the Old Testament Sanctuary service. In a chapter titled "The Nature of the Judgment", Haskell highlights that divine judgment points to an eternal death separating the condemned forever from the saved ones. Within this framework, which emphasises the nature of death as an eternal separation from which "No one can escape,"[29] Haskell discusses the unchangeability of the sentence issued by the heavenly court. Most specifically, he claims that accepting Christ's sacrifice is the only way to be pardoned and saved and as "Earthly parents have been known to sacrifice everything they possessed to save ONE child from the condemnation of earthly courts. Think you our heavenly Father would let Satan destroy all His earthly children without an effort to save them? He risked all heaven for their sakes."[30]

White would have been in basic agreement with Haskell's interpretation of the judgment and consequences of sin. Even though the book was published only one year before White's death, it could reflect a long-standing idea Haskell could have had and shared with White. It seems clear that

[28] Hannah, *The life of Christ,* 199.
[29] Haskell, *The Cross and its Shadow,* 230.
[30] Ibid., 231.

Haskell believes that risk was implied in Christ's sacrifice and that the consequences of sin are serious and unavoidable. Moreover, the judgment of the heavenly court is unchangeable, and, in the words of Haskell, "no one can escape it." If Haskell meant that Christ could also be subjected to eternal death, which is not developed in his book, the question of a risk is implied in Haskell's theological frame, and his chapter deals with this topic.

Daniel March (1816-1909), an academic and a pastor of the Congregational church in the second half of the 1800s and then of a Presbyterian church in Philadelphia, was a constant writer of volumes on biblical themes, which gained a wide reputation internationally. His book *Days of the Son of Man* was written in a period close to White's book *The Desire of Ages,* with similar content and a striking similarity noticeable between White's and March's use of the language of 'infinite'. As White uses the term 'infinite' to refer to the love of Christ, the cost of his sacrifice, the price of redemption, and more, March uses the same language of infinite but without extending it, as White does, to the realm of 'risk'. However, March's use of terms such as 'infinite love', 'infinite price', 'infinite grace', 'infinite compensation', 'infinite gulf of perdition', and more may have offered fertile ground to White's elaboration. An example is precisely March's reasoning around what happened at the cross,

> Our present life would be a pitiless and hopeless orphanage, and the hour of death would be the beginning of endless despair. But when we see the glory of the eternal Father shining in the face of the divine and eternal Son, we are attracted by infinite grace and benignity, and we rejoice in the accents of paternal love. We believe that the infinite One pities our infirmities as a human father pities his own children. We have a Father to love us with infinite and everlasting love, to draw us to himself with more than a mother's yearning toward a wayward child. It is only when we come near the cross of Jesus that we see the infinite Creator and Governor of the universe manifesting such paternal tenderness and condescension towards us.[31]

March uses the term 'infinite' in combination with words addressing God's actions or status, such as 'grace', 'benignity', 'love', 'Creator', 'Governor', (eternal) 'Father' and 'Son', and places it in parallel with terms indicating human's condition such as 'endless despair'. This language is similar to White's writings, suggesting some form of influence from the part of March's book, which pre-date White's. However, not much more may be argued in terms of theological dependence.

[31] March, *Days of the Son of Man,* 629.

Widely using the language of 'infinite' is also the book titled *The Rock of Our Salvation: A Treatise Respecting the Natures, Person, Offices, Work, Sufferings, and Glory of Jesus Christ* by William S. Plumer (1802-1880), an American theologian and clergyman, and an intellectual leader of the Presbyterian Church in the 1800s. In his book, Plumer holds a view dear to White, that of divine and human natures indissolubly united. This concept is crucial to White's idea of Christ risking his life as she believes that the Incarnation is an indissoluble tie and an irreversible one, as it will be discussed. However, Plumer also believes that Christ's divine soul inhabited the human body and that divinity is unchangeable, "cannot suffer, cannot die".[32] These concepts do not find full resonance in White's writings. Moreover, Plumer is sure that Christ could not live and act "under rules fit for the government of creatures."[33] This approach to the Incarnation may not have served White's understanding of Christ's natures. Nevertheless, Plumer's book could have offered White material to consider some of the topics she develops in *The Desire of Ages.*

Though not exhaustive, this survey has offered insight into White's theological background and sources. White's agreement with some authors is evident, but only on some points. However, while the selected books show some similarities, they emphasize White's unique contribution. It is challenging to determine how influential these books were at her time, how widely known, and how she could be indebted to these contributions, as she was selective in accepting ideas. Her theology, including the concept of infinite risk, stands apart from contemporary scholarship.

Nevertheless, it is clear that White's theology, more generally, and the theology of infinite risk, more specifically, have not evolved in a socio-religious and theological vacuum. Her exposure to Wesleyanism and Puritanism, Calvinism and Arminianism, among other traditions, might have created a theological atmosphere facilitating White's position and inserted it in a context of dialogue strongly influenced by the theological traditions converging in Adventism, such as Baptism, Congregationalism, Presbyterianism, and a much earlier and broader Protestant tradition.[34] Although her specific infinite risk theology seems not to relate to any particular theological positions,

[32] Plumer, *The Rock of Our Salvation,* 62.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Adventism (and White) is indebted to other influences such as Christian Connectionism, Anabaptism, and Lutheranism. See George Knight, "Development of SDA Theology," in *Lectures presented at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary* (Berrien Springs, MI: April, 1993), 2-7.

whether prior or current to her times, these theological traditions and her religious upbringing impacted her theology to some degree.

It may be noted, as previously presented, that her language and terminology owe much to other contemporary authors and Methodism in particular. Her way of doing theology, emphasizing love and doctrine, also has much to do with her Wesleyan background. The same may be true of nineteenth-century America's religious thinking, which was largely Puritan and driven by a sola scriptura approach to all life issues. Restorationism (or Primitivism) was also a key force in America, attempting to return to the Bible and an unblemished Early Christianity.

While the theological 'atmosphere' in which White breathed is relevant to understanding her language, hermeneutic approach, and the frame for her concept of infinite risk, her prophetic identity is also a crucial element of the broad picture.[35] Her role as a prophet within Adventism is probably the weightiest influence on her theology. This dominant factor does not minimize the significance of the influences mentioned above. Her prophetic status seems distinctive in that it allowed White to embrace and reinforce those beliefs she observed in her 'theological world' while simultaneously rejecting what she considers 'error'. In her lifespan, she had more than two-thousand visionary experiences, often marked by declarations such as "I was shown", "I saw", "I heard", and "I was carried."[36] However, she was reluctant to call herself a prophet and sceptical about visionary movements and experiences.[37] Therefore, her inspiration and, consequently, her authority deserve some attention.[38]

Adventism recognizes her as an inspired writer appointed by God to deliver a special message, primarily calling people to return to Scripture in anticipation of Christ's second coming. It is important to note that she never claims her writings to be on par with the biblical canon, nor can they replace the Bible. Instead, she consistently directs her readers to the Scriptures as the ultimate

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[35] See also Dopp Aamodt, Land, and Numbers, *Ellen Harmon White: American Prophet;* Rene Noorbergen, *Ellen G. White: Prophet of Destiny* (New Canaan, CT: Keats Publishing, Inc., 1972).

[36] See the chapters "Visions" and "Prophet" in Dopp Aamodt, Land, and Numbers, *Ellen Harmon White: American Prophet.*

[37] During White's time, many claimed to reveal new truths by prophetic gifts (e.g. Joseph Smith for Mormonism, Mary Baker Eddy for Christian Science, etc.).

[38] Questions raised by her prophetic ministry may fall beyond the scope of this research, such as: Was she infallible? Were all her writings inspired? Are her writings placed beyond the realm of criticism because of divine inspiration? For an insight into White's ministry, and religious visionary experience, see the recent volume edited by Burt, *Understanding Ellen White: The Life and Work of the Most Influential Voice in Adventist History,* with particular attention to ch.6 (83-94), "Ellen White as God's Spokesperson" by Herbert Douglass.

standard against which all other writings, including her own, should be evaluated. Thus, she was open to correction when incorrect statements or errors were found in her books before publications (mainly on facts and historical or biographical material), and she never claimed to be infallible.[39] She was also very cautious about doctrinal points she was unsure about or had not received a divine revelation. About White's written ministry, Denis Kaiser states that White "was convinced that these messages came from God and thus had divine authority."[40] In the context of White's theology of infinite risk, divine authority and revelation would imply that her understanding of God's willingness to take a risk in the plan of salvation and the nature of Christ's sacrifice are shaped by her conviction that she has received divine insights. Her theology of infinite risk, of which no directed reference to a similar idea is found in the theological context with which she could have interfaced, seemingly relies much on what she would perceive as divine revelation. She certainly saw her writings as a message from God. Nevertheless, despite her assertions of inspiration and revelation, her theology deserves critical analysis and rigorous scholarly examination.

Even though White held the role of a prophet, her theology of infinite risk raised minimal interest within Adventist tradition during her lifetime.[41] Traces of an engagement with White's infinite risk theology are confined to the late 1800s and early 1900s among Adventist theologians, thus placing the current analysis at the forefront of a forgotten and unresolved theological debate. The Adventist writer Joseph H. Waggoner (1820-1889),[42] as early as 1863, wrote a series of articles on the subject of 'atonement'. Initially published in the *Review and Herald*, they were reproduced a few years later in a book titled *The Atonement in the Light of Reason and Revelation* (1868). The articles also appeared in the *Signs of the Times* of 1876, and a final re-edition came out as a new book in 1884, *The Atonement in the Light of Nature and Revelation*. At the centre of Waggoner's argument is the relation between the Trinitarian doctrine and the meaning of Christ's atoning sacrifice. Waggoner writes, "We firmly believe in the divinity of Christ; but we cannot accept the idea of a trinity, as it is held by Trinitarians, without giving up our claim on the dignity of the sacrifice made for our

[39] She states that "in regard to infallibility, I never claimed it; God alone is infallible. His word is true and in Him is no variableness, or shadow of turning" 1SM, 37.

[40] Kaiser, "How Ellen White Did Her Writing," 119.

[41] And also beyond, as it will be demonstrated.

[42] Father of Ellet J. Waggoner known during the Conference of 1888 in Minneapolis.

redemption."[43] Waggoner seems to claim that the sacrifice of Christ may not be valued in its true light and highest sense if one believes in the mainstream Trinitarian belief.

Waggoner, like White, argues for the importance of understanding the Godhead starting from the soteriological and Christological ground, and not vice versa. More specifically, Waggoner thinks that not all theological views regarding Christ's nature are reliable and, most of all, the idea "that the Christ that died was only the human nature in which the divinity had dwelt"[44] or that "the Divine Son of God could not suffer nor die."[45] For him, these are only "mere human words."[46] Waggoner strongly emphasizes that "no matter how exalted the pre-existent Son was; no matter how glorious, how powerful, or even eternal; if the manhood only died, the sacrifice was only human. […] Thus the remark is just that the doctrine of a trinity degrades the Atonement, resting it solely on a human offering as a basis."[47] Waggoner does not develop the scenario presented by White; he does not think of the death of divinity as the outcome of failure. His argument is based on the assumption that the sacrifice could not be an atoning one if it did not imply the death of divinity. However, this concept is not thoroughly elaborated. What did Waggoner mean by the need for the divinity to die for a real atonement? This does not appear too evident in Waggoner's theology. His atonement views are based on the necessity of a sacrifice, not merely human. Thus, his belief has not to do with Christ's possible peccability but with an atoning act beyond human nature. In other words, if it is only human nature to die then the merits of salvation would rest only on humanity and not on divinity.

Waggoner's idea that the divine nature could be included in the sacrificial death lends itself well to thinking that, if Christ had sinned, the divinity would have been lost forever. However, while Waggoner does not discuss it, White comes to this conclusion from a different perspective. Although she claims that the Deity suffered on Calvary,[48] her viewpoint seems to be focused on the inseparable union of Christ's divinity and humanity and thus on the active involvement of the divine

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[43] Joseph. H. Waggoner, *The Atonement in Light of Nature and Revelation* (Facsimile reproduction; Calhoun, GA: TEACH Service, 2006), 165.

[44] Joseph H. Waggoner, "The Atonement-Part II, The Doctrine of A Trinity Degrades The Atonement. (Continued.)," RH 3 November 1863, para. 26.

[45] Ibid., "The Atonement-Part II, The Doctrine of A Trinity Degrades The Atonement. (Continued.)," RH 10 November 1863, paras 16 and 19.

[46] Ibid., para. 19.

[47] Waggoner, *The Atonement in Light of Nature and Revelation,* 164-165.

[48] "After the camp meeting," RH 4 April 1899. See also 2.2.2 "The Interaction between Divine and Human Nature."

nature in Christ's human experiences and sufferings. She claims that Christ's human nature was the one that died, as "Deity did not sink and die; that would have been impossible."[49] However, she writes this within a perfect scenario of a successful sacrifice and probably in light of the opposite potential outcome, the risk scenario. In White's view, it is inevitable that if Christ had instead sinned, his divinity would have died. So, even if White holds the same opinion that Christ could die, she means something Waggoner does not explicitly say: the ceasing of his divine existence. White frames this option always within the hypothesis that Christ could sin.[50] Waggoner, instead, ascribed the death of divinity to the realm of atonement and the necessity of a sacrifice beyond human merit. Still, his concept of the death of God remains unclear. Diverging opinions may also be due to different conceptions of 'divinity' and 'Trinity'.[51]

It may have value thinking about the contribution of another contemporary of White, Ellet J. Waggoner (1855-1916), son of Joseph, in his book *Christ and His Righteousness.* He more cautiously writes: "If anyone springs the old cavil, how Christ could be immortal and yet die, we have only to say that we do not know. We make no pretensions of fathoming infinity."[52] On the one hand, the statement's ambiguity lies in whether it refers to Christ as a divine being dying on the cross as a human or addresses the intriguing possibility of a divine being dying if he had sinned. This may follow what has been said about his father's view of atonement. On the other, fathoming infinity is indeed impossible and beyond the human finite mind. He also highlights that the theological concept of the death of the immortal Christ is part of an old discussion, an "old cavil." The problem is evident: how can a divine immortal being die? For White, the point is much more than an 'old cavil' but is crucial to salvation. It shows the fullest sense of Christ's love and sheds some light on the mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption. It gives input to the question of the influence exerted by human nature on the divine one. It opens a path for theological reasoning regarding the weight of the assumption of human nature into the divine one. It points to the blending of the divine and human nature as a process that 'produces' a 'new reality' that is no longer divine and human, but divine-human.

Therefore, focusing again on White's Trinitarian and Christological perspectives becomes a necessary movement here, dictated by their crucial role in her infinite risk theology. This requires

[49] Lt. 280a, 3 September 1904, para. 8 (to 'Ministers, Physicians, and Teachers'; variant of Lt 280, para. 9).

[50] This does not imply a Unitarian view of God, as White never holds the belief that Christ could not be equal to God himself in order to make it possible to die.

[51] See more on this topic in 4.5 "Divinity's Death and its Universal Consequences."

[52] Ellet J. Waggoner, *Christ and His Righteousness*, (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 1890), 23.

an exploration of how these foundational frameworks intertwine with her views, and which implications they have for the infinite risk theology. It is relevant here to consider in which ways White's theology aligns with or departs from some of the traditional views on God and the Incarnation.

1.3 White's Infinite Risk Theology between Christological and Trinitarian Discussions

It is evident that the Trinitarian and Christological substratum is central to White's infinite risk theology, and White holds some main concepts shared by the Christian tradition. Trying here to avoid the obvious risk of broadening the discussion into the long-standing and broad Trinitarian and Christological debates, I find it crucial to focus on White's hermeneutics and views within these significant doctrinal frameworks. In this regard, it makes sense to note that White writes that,

> The Sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin is the great truth around which all other truths cluster. In order to be rightly understood and appreciated, every truth in the Word of God, from Genesis to Revelation, must be studied in the light that streams from the cross of Calvary. I present before you the great, grand monument of mercy and regeneration, salvation and redemption,—the Son of God uplifted on the cross.[53]

Christ is undoubtedly at the centre of White's theology, and his sacrifice is key to her hermeneutics. Her Christology is driven by Soteriology and rooted in it. Her perspectives on Christ's actions indirectly shed light on Christ's identity. The sequence presumably flows from one concept to another rather than the reverse. Her methodological approach is deeply rooted in biblical categories. She tends to construct an understanding of the Incarnation, nature(s), mission, and death of Christ based on the soteriological event of the "cross of Calvary." Although White's hermeneutical approach to Christological and Trinitarian ideas does not appear overly articulate,[54] and despite the unsystematic character of her writings and, often, the lack of the common language of systematic theologians, she generally draws her views from theological readings oriented by the Bible and the long-standing history of typological approaches to Biblical interpretation.[55] Therefore,

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[53] GW, 315.

[54] These themes are still topics of large debates and great interest for Adventist theologians today. They are complex and not easily expressed, especially in relation to Christ's divine-human nature and the oneness and threeness of God.

[55] To a certain degree, a sort of typological theology controlled Christology in ancient times and did not disappear completely over time. Neville affirms that in many cases the study of Christology is the study of doctrines about Christ,

a biblical proof-text methodology and a rich cross-Testaments approach have often dominated her writings. [56] Her discussions on Christological questions, within the frame of literal-biblical hermeneutics, try to preserve the basic concept of Christ as one agent, both divine and human, without appealing to metaphysical terminology used by modern scholars. However, when she discusses Trinitarian and Christological views, her use of theological language may align to a certain degree with common terminology, though may not consistently convey the same theological meaning.

For example, when she writes in 1893 about the unity of Father and Son, she uses the term "one substance" as follows: "[I]t seemed that divinity flashed through humanity as Jesus said 'I and my Father are one.' The words of Christ were full of deep meaning as he put forth the claim that he and the Father were of one substance, possessing the same attributes."[57] However, her concept of 'one substance' is not to be understood as pointing to a unique and shared substance between Father and Son. The text in itself seems to describe "one substance" as "possessing the same attributes." This appears to be the only ever quotation from White's writings using the terminology "of one substance". This is worth noting. However, a survey of her writings seems to imply a very material, non-abstract, non-theological use of the term "substance" that, joined with the close statement "possessing the same attributes", seems to imply only a sharing of divine attributes. In order to

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while "a more fruitful way forward in our time […] is through studies of the major symbols of Jesus Christ and how they function to engage people truly or falsely with God." Robert C. Neville, *Symbols of Jesus, A Christology of Symbolic engagement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), xvii.

White's theology is an example of it, especially in regard to the use of tabernacle imagery (with its services and structure) as Christological metaphors. What results from this complex theological interpretation is from one side a Christological bridge between the Old and New Covenants, pointing to eschatological fulfilments, but from the other the shaping of diachronic multiple identities of Christ, over time and space expressing his earthly and heavenly ministry, the main ones that of the sacrificial lamb, the atoning priest, and the eschatological judge. White's Christology is, therefore, not only the study of doctrines related to Christ but also of Christ's identities. In the 19th century several authors showed interest into the topic of the tabernacle as a type of Christ, see William G. Rhind, *The Tabernacle In the Wilderness; the Shadow of Heavenly Things* (London: Samuel Bagster & Sons, Paternoster Row, 1842); James Nisbet, *The Tabernacle: Its Literal Uses and Spiritual Application*s (London: James Nisbet and Co, 1853); Richard Newton, *The Jewish Tabernacle and Its Furniture in their Typical Teaching* (New York, NY: R.Carter & Brothers, 1864); William Brown, *The Tabernacle and Its Priests and Services, Described and Considered in Relation to Christ and the Church* (Edinburgh: W. Oliphant&Company, 1871); Frank H. White, *Christ in the Tabernacle* (London: S. W. Partridge & Co, 1883).

In reference to early Christianity, see Ann Conway-Jones, *Gregory of Nyssa's tabernacle imagery in its Jewish and Christian Contexts* (Oxford Early Christian Studies; Oxford: OUP, 2014). See also Peter J.Leithart, "'We saw his glory.' Implications of the Sanctuary Christology in John's Gospel" in *Christology, Ancient and Modern: Explorations in Constructive Dogmatics* (ed. Oliver Crisp and Fred Sanders; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 307-373.

[56] For an analysis of White's theological hermeneutics and writing activity, see 1.2, and ch. 2.

[57] "The True Sheep Respond to the Voice of the Shepherd," ST 27 November 1893, para. 5.

clarify the point, a further comment, among many others, may shed light on her understanding of the term 'substance.' In the book *Patriarchs and Prophets,* published three years earlier, White states that "Christ, the Word, the only begotten of God, was one with the eternal Father, one in nature, in character, in purpose, the only being that could enter into all the counsels and purposes of God."[58]

White clarifies that her concept of 'one substance' refers to the oneness of nature, character and purpose with the Father, and not to the sharing of a single substance. White seems to use the phrase "of one substance" alongside "possessing the same attributes" so that the latter may encapsulate the meaning of the former. She seems to emphasize a profound and comprehensive understanding of a form of Threeness and unity of God's nature encompassing the sharing of attributes. Thus, White relies on the use of "same attributes" to address the oneness of God's substance but away from the numerical unity of the Trinity.

Trinitarian views are not necessarily identical to traditionalism, and White's concept of one substance, referring to the oneness of nature and not to the sharing of a single substance, is a crucial element of her views. However, White does not elaborate or provide further details about this specific concept and why she does not use a language common to Nicaea and Chalcedon. It is worth noting, however, that this concept does not appear to rely on extensive elaboration or theological development. It was already sketched in an early publication amongst the most famous of White's books, *The Great Controversy.* This book, whose story starts in 1858, with a main edition in 1888 and an expanded final edition in 1911, is a theological examination of the 'controversy' between Christ and Satan from its very beginning in heaven to its final moment at the last judgment of God. In this publication, White clearly establishes a relation of unity between the Father and the Son constituted by shared characteristics such as power and authority. She writes that Christ, as the Son of God, "was the acknowledged Sovereign of heaven, one in power and authority with the Father."[59]

How White describes the relationship between Christ and his Father is never developed in the direction of suggesting a single substance. Indeed, she writes that Christ was "equal with the Father,"[60] which made it possible for him to save the transgressors of God's law. However, Christ and the Father are two distinct beings, not two consubstantial hypostatic persons, but they possess

[58] PP, 34.
[59] GC88, 495.
[60] FE, 179.

equal divine status, attributes and characteristics. To save men, the Father gave "his Son, equal with himself, possessing the attributes of God"[61] but both the "Father and the Son each have a personality."[62] In other words, following White's reasoning, "from eternity there was a complete unity between the Father and the Son" but "they were two, yet little short of being identical; two in individuality, yet one in spirit, and heart, and character."[63] Besides highlighting again the eternity of both the Father and the Son, White clearly distinguishes the two persons. With the statement "yet little short of being identical," she implies that the Father and the Son are one at the level of spirit, heart, and character though "two in individuality." The only reason for not being identical is exactly their 'individuality.' In this sense, as previously said, White often uses the term 'Godhead', or 'Heavenly Trio', or 'three living persons', and others, instead of 'Trinity' to move away from the Trinitarian view which affirms the distinctiveness of the divine persons while holding numerical sameness.

This view is furthermore confirmed by Arthur L. White's (1907–1991) reflections on the use of the term 'Trinity' in White's writings.[64] Grandson of Ellen White, he worked for many years on the writings of her grandmother, providing a number of valuable publications reflecting an in-depth understanding of White's life, theology, and literary heritage.[65] In *The Ellen G. White Writings,* he conveys to his reader a profound understanding of the mechanisms of inspiration and composition of the message exemplified in the experiences of her grandmother. While also providing insights into the history of Adventism, the book is a comprehensive overview of White's prophetic and literary ministry, hermeneutical principles, socio-historical context, and other theological perspectives. Specifically, in a chapter titled "Hermeneutical Principles in the E. G. White Writings," the author deals with the term 'Trinity' in a sub-section titled "Consistent and Repeated Declarations on a Critical Point." He writes: "One such case relates to the personality of God and involves the Trinity. I have failed to find one instance in which Ellen White employs the term Trinity."[66] In fact, while he states that White was brought up in the Methodist Church, following a creed whose initial tenet declares "There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body or parts, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the maker and preserver of all things, visible and invisible. And in

[61] "Imperative Necessity of Searching for Truth," RH 8 November 1892.
[62] "Circulate the Publications, No. 1," RH 6 August 1908, para. 14.
[63] "The New Commandment – part. 1," YI 16 December 1897, para. 5.
[64] For more information about Arthur L. White, see first footnote of 1.2. "Who is Ellen White?"
[65] See the "Bibliography" for more titles.
[66] Arthur L. White, *The Ellen G. White Writings,* 156. See esp. 156-158.

unity of this Godhead there are three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.—The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1888, pp. 16, 17,"[67] he also affirms that she reacted "against this doctrine" and others such as "the devastating teachings of the 'spiritualizers' in the mid-1840's" (those who believed that God has no body or parts).[68] In this context he reports a statement of White on the bodily persons and distinctiveness of the Father and the Son, "I have often seen the lovely Jesus, that He is a person. I asked Him if His Father was a person and had a form like Himself. Said Jesus, 'I am the express image of My Father's person."[69] He also writes in reference to the history of Adventism that,

> [o]ur forefathers consistently were averse to the doctrine of the Trinity as defined in church creeds, notably the Methodist. They saw in it an element that "spiritualized" away both Jesus Christ and God. James White [*husband of Ellen White, ndr*] in a letter sent to the *Day Star* and published in the issue of January 24, 1846, speaks of — A certain class who deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ. This class can be no other than those who spiritualize away the existence of the Father and the Son, as two distinct, literal, tangible persons, also a literal Holy city and throne of David.... The way spiritualizers this way have disposed of or denied the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ is first using the old unscriptural trinitarian creed.[70]

Henceforth, White's comprehension of the relationship between Christ and the Father, along with the subtleties embedded in her theological discourse, appears to diverge from the conventional Trinitarian framework. This departure is notably corroborated by the perspectives espoused by contemporaneous theologians within the Adventist tradition. This distinctive perspective challenges the idea of a single substance or consubstantial hypostatic persons. Arthur L. White's analysis confirms her distinctive perspective on the nature of the Godhead and challenging traditional notions of unity within the Trinity.

If it is true that equality and sharing of attributes may be seen exactly as what Christian tradition identifies with the 'single substance', White's idea of a non-numerical sameness paves the way to the rejection of the concept of 'hypostatic persons'. This may lead to thinking that White could support a form of tritheism. However, if generally tritheism is understood as a form of polytheism

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[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid.

[69] EW, 77.

[70] Arthur L. White, *The Ellen G. White Writings,* 158.

with three independent gods and if it diverges from the fundamental unity of God and questions the concept of a singular divine nature shared by the three persons, White's scripturally-driven theology holds tied to an idea of monotheism. Thus, while she emphasizes the individuality of each divine person over the single *ousia,* she posits the existence of three separate and distinct divine beings within the context of a monotheistic belief system. However, tritheism has taken different forms throughout the centuries, sometimes not far from White's views. It often postulated the existence of three independent deities with their own individual divinity, each an independent centre of consciousness and determination, sometimes implying a polytheistic and hierarchical structure or suggesting ontological differences between the persons. A tritheism that accepts the threeness of God but ignores a form of unity of God is not the kind of doctrine of God White would fully embrace.

While she does not perceive the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as a single reality but rather as three distinct or separate persons in a 'collective group', the Godhead, the admission of three infinitely perfect beings should not at all imply the existence of a difference in the persons of the Trinity. Obviously, the doctrine of the Trinity affirmed at the Council of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381) asserts that God is one being existing simultaneously and eternally as three distinct co-equal persons, three hypostases in one *ousia,* or one God existing in three distinct hypostases. Often, this concept has been articulated as "three persons in one God", intending that all three of them, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as co-eternal beings, are of one indivisible Divine essence.

In attempting to explicate White's distinctive perspective, it becomes evident, as previously stated, that her conceptualization envisions the divine persons as existing not in a unified substance, as conventionally understood in Trinitarian doctrine, but rather as three distinct entities that share identical substances, as three in three, rather than three in one. This is especially highlighted by White's afore-mentioned statements on the corporeal identities and distinctiveness of the Father and the Son. In this case, the pivotal point is that White's concept seems not to rely on three hypostases in one substance but rather what could be probably expressed as three substances in three persons. Furthermore, as White maintains a nuanced sense of unity among these distinct persons, her theological stance occupies a distinct space, teetering between a Trinitarian and Tritheistic framework. This nuanced position echoes a resonance with the theological reflections of Jürgen Moltmann, suggesting a complex interplay between Trinitarian and Tritheistic elements in certain theological perspectives. In fact, tritheism may lie, at times, close to certain Trinitarian views.

Moltmann's trinitarian discussion in *The Crucified God* [71] has faced criticism due to its metaphysical foundations, especially as his theology of divine suffering may lead to tritheism. Various scholars have raised the question of whether Moltmann's view is tritheistic as his emphasis on the operation of the divine persons as subjects united perichoretically may compromise their ontological unity.[72] Others have argued that Moltmann's trinitarian formulations lack an ontological dimension[73] or that move from a theology of being to a theology of act.[74] The problem rests on the fact that the unity of Son and Father would be constituted in act. This potentially results in a form of tritheism where three Gods are united only in intention, volitionally, but separate in being, ontologically. This seems to resound in the words of White when she writes that

> the personality of the Father and the Son, also the unity that exists between Them, are presented in the seventeenth chapter of John, in the prayer of Christ for His disciples: 'Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word; that they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me.' John 17:20, 21. The unity that exists between Christ and His disciples does not destroy the personality of either. They are one in purpose, in mind, in character, but not in person. It is thus that God and Christ are one.[75]

White's concept of 'being one' is clearly defined as "in purpose, in mind, in character, but not in person," or three persons ontologically separate. The concept of the divine persons as subjects united perichoretically is a theological idea that pertains to the relationship and interaction among the three persons of the Trinity. If 'perichoresis' is intended as a dynamic and harmonious unity, more than a mutual indwelling or interpenetration, then White would agree that the divine persons share a profound communion of love and fellowship yet maintain their distinct identities. They are not isolated entities but rather exist individually in a mutually enhancing and intimate way. The unity among the divine persons is not mere cooperation or coordination but a profound interrelationship

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[71] Jürgen Moltmann, *The crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (trans. R.A. Wilson and John Bowden; various editions, consulted Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993).

[72] See John J. O'Donnell, "The doctrine of the Trinity in recent German theology," *The Heythrop Journal* 23 (1982): 153-167 (esp. 165).

[73] John Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1994), 51.

[74] George Hunsinger, "The crucified God and the political theory of violence: A critical survey of Jürgen Moltmann's recent thought," *The Heythrop Journal* 14 (1973): 266-279 (esp. 278).

[75] MH, 421–422.

at the very core of their individual being. This kind of Godhead, White thinks, is still inherently relational.

Within this framework, though Christ is God, and he is God as much as the Father, the assumption of human nature brought him into a condition in which – White argues – if he had sinned, he would have lost everything, divinity included. White seems to assume that if Christ sinned, he would not be resurrected. Similarly to the potential tritheism posited by Moltmann's view on the ontological nature of God, White thinks that Christ's death could sever the divine unity and separate the persons, creating a division in the very beings of the Father and Son. From the point of view of Nicene trinitarianism, one would object, how could Christ be separated from God? That would be impossible. However, if the Father and the Son are not 'one being' but 'two individualities', White's infinite risk theology becomes plausible. Christ could lose himself forever and cease to exist as a divine being. If she does not think of the Trinity as one in the way mainstream Nicene Christianity does, then it becomes possible to presume that Christ, as ontologically other, could die as a divine being.

It may probably seem still a kind of intellectual leap from one idea to the next, that of moving from a Christ that could sin to a Christ unable to resurrect and thus ceasing to exist. One idea does not certainly automatically follow the other. And, what is evident to White may not seem apparent to everybody else because she does not explain it explicitly. Inscribing White's theology into Arian, subordination, or adoptionist frameworks – or a combination of those and others – would instead be a mistake, as these views were alien to White's thinking.[76] Adjusting White's Trinitarian and Christological concepts to some of these views would help explain her infinite risk theology, but it would not be consistent with her doctrine of God.

Even if White believes that Christ is God in its highest sense, nevertheless, his nature is "infinite mysterious in itself", as she explains,

[76] In these sorts of presumed frameworks, Christ could become human and obedient to the Father, thus the status he has after the resurrection is a kind of reward for the way he acted. It follows that if Christ had acted differently, disobeying the Father, then he would not have received the reward but the condemnation to eternal death. This may lead to think that the moment the divine Christ becomes human, he is in a way on his own. If he does not fulfil his mission, as there is no advantage in the fact that he is actually being sent by the Father, his failure would mean no redemption for him.

> [i]f Christ made all things, he existed before all things. The words spoken in regard to this are so decisive that no one need be left in doubt. Christ was God essentially, and in the highest sense. He was with God from all eternity, God over all, blessed forevermore […] There are light and glory in the truth that Christ was one with the Father before the foundation of the world was laid. This is the light shining in a dark place, making it resplendent with divine, original glory. This truth, infinitely mysterious in itself, explains other mysterious and otherwise unexplainable truths, while it is enshrined in light, unapproachable and incomprehensible.[77]

Alluding to biblical references such as John 1:1 and Colossians 1:16-17, White distinguishes Christ from the Father by stating that Christ is "God over all" and at the same time, he was with "God from all eternity." While she affirms that Christ was one with the Father even before creation – though this should not be understood (as previously clarified) as a oneness of a single substance – she indeed recognizes that light and darkness shadow the question of the nature of Christ, thus leaving it in mystery. However, paradoxically, she highlights that there is enough clarity to explain other mysterious and otherwise unexplainable truths. Nevertheless, the nature of Christ remains enshrined in an unapproachable and incomprehensible light.

In the previously mentioned book *Patriarchs and Prophets*, White seems to present, in an apologetic form, the position of the Son in relation to the Father by saying that "The King of the universe summoned the heavenly hosts before Him, that in their presence He might set forth the true position of His Son, and show the relation He sustained to all created beings. The Son of God shared the Father's throne, and the glory of the eternal, self-existent One encircled both."[78] From the hermeneutical point of view, the source of this statement (as of many others, if not of all of her ministry) is claimed to be that of a vision, thus detached from any theological influence.[79] She 'sees' the Father as officially presenting the Son to the heavenly angels to clarify his true position. Christ shared the Father's throne, and the glory of divinity encircled both. The statement is framed within a discourse around the rebellion of the angel Lucifer and his desire for supremacy. In this dispute about the supremacy of Christ as the Son of God, White highlights the self-existence of Christ and his eternal and divine nature.

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[77] "The Word Made Flesh," RH 5 April 1906, par 6 and 8 (reprinted by request from ST 26 April 1899).

[78] PP, 36.

[79] For an analysis of White's ministry, and visionary experience, see 1.2 and 2.1.

In reference to the relationship between the Son and the Father and the nature of Christ, White states also that Christ is "our everlasting Father."[80] This declaration is elaborated around the discourse on the good shepherd of John 10. White does not claim that Christ is the Father but that both possess an identical fatherly role in reference to the human beings who are the sheep of the good shepherd discourse. Continuing her reasoning about the eternal nature of the Son of God, who is also a father to human beings, White expresses a relevant biblical interpretation focused on Zechariah 13:7[81], saying, "What a statement is this! – the only-begotten Son, He who is in the bosom of the Father, He whom God has declared to be the 'Man that is My fellow' (Zech. 13:7), the communion between Him and the eternal God is taken to represent the communion between Christ and His children on the earth!"[82]

The verse of Zechariah is interpreted in a Christological sense, pointing to Christ as a 'fellow', an 'associate'[83] of God the Father, someone at the same level, equal to Himself. The communion between the Son and the Father represents the unity between Christ and human beings. Vice versa, the unity of Christ with the human beings as his children mirrors that of the Father with the Son. In this sense, Christ, as the Son of God, is presented as a distinct person from the Father. Following this reasoning, in the same book, White strongly emphasises that the life of Christ has three principal characteristics: "[i]n Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived. […] The divinity of Christ is the believer's assurance of eternal life."[84] If, on the one hand, these three characteristics are strong evidence of Christ's divinity and individuality and of his being equal but other respect to the Father, on the other, they point to his human nature taken in the Incarnation to guarantee the salvation of the believers. As Christ's divine nature is perfectly identical to that of his Father, so his human nature is identical to that of every human being so that he could assure eternal life to those who believe in him. This may support the concept that, to be the believer's assurance of eternal life, the incarnated life of Christ as a human being had to be subjected to all human experiences, including the risk of (eternal) death.

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[80] DA, 483.

[81] "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is my associate, says the Lord of hosts. Strike the shepherd, that the sheep may be scattered; I will turn my hand against the little ones."

[82] DA, 483.

[83] The Hebrew term עֲמִיתִי has been rendered as 'fellow,' 'companion,' 'partner,' 'associate,' 'one who is close to me,' 'one who is related to me,' 'one who is my citizen,' 'near to me,' 'my friend,' and more.

[84] DA, 530.

In an extended comment on John 8-9, within the context of the discourse of Christ as the light of life, White comments again on the divine nature of Christ while analysing the dialogue between Christ and the Pharisees on the question of the true lineage of Abraham. The divine characteristic that she points out is Christ's self-existence. The starting ground of her elaboration is John 8:58, where Christ declares his pre-existence by saying, "Before Abraham was, I am." Commenting on this and emphasising Christ's use of God's name 'I am', White writes that,

> Silence fell upon the vast assembly. The name of God, given to Moses to express the idea of the eternal presence, had been claimed as His own by this Galilean Rabbi. He had announced Himself to be the self-existent One, He who had been promised to Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from the days of eternity.[85]

White's interpretation highlights the relevance of Christ's divine declaration. Christ's claim of being the 'I am' is evident in White's view. She intends the name of God as the expression of eternal presence. In this way, Christ presented himself as the self-existent One. With a reference to Micah 5:2, "whose goings forth have been from of old, from the days of eternity," White also ascribes this verse to the eternal and self-existing divine nature of Christ. This comment adds to her general understanding of Christ as an individual divine being, distinct from the Father, and whose divine nature is not derived, given or borrowed but eternal, original and self-existing. This very concept – that in a way 'detaches' the Son from the Father because Christ's nature is described as underived, unborrowed, and self-existing – lends itself well to establishing that 'independent' status in White's view that can facilitate the idea of the eternal separation and death of the divine Son of God, if he had sinned. Actually, it may be claimed that this idea can constitute the basis of the 'possibility' of infinite risk, as it highlights the individuality of the Son of God.

However, White establishes a form of unity between Christ and the Father as she writes in 1890 that "[t]he world's Redeemer was equal with God. His authority was as the authority of God. He declared that he had no existence separate from the Father. The authority by which he spoke, and wrought miracles, was expressly his own, yet he assures us that he and the Father are one."[86] If, on the one hand, Christ is presented as equal with God the Father, on the other, he also possesses an individual divine authority. Within this interplay of individuality and unity, one must understand that

[85] Ibid., 469.

[86] "Christ Revealed the Father," RH 7 January 1890, par 1.

Christ's existence is independent but not "separate from the Father". They certainly exist from eternity, sharing the same characteristics and eternal, uncreated, and self-existent nature. White also uses, as it shall be shown, the concept of "close fellowship" to describe the unity of Father and Son.[87]

Around the same period, based on the concept that Christ is the Saviour, White writes that "Jehovah is the name given to Christ."[88] In this sense, she highlights Christ's divinity through a name, YHWH, that he can rightfully use.[89] In identifying Christ with Jehovah, she writes that he is "the eternal, self-existent, uncreated One, Himself the source and sustainer of all […] alone entitled to supreme reverence and worship."[90] She does not explicitly clarify if her assertion of Christ's self-existent and uncreated nature implies its 'unrelatedness' to that of the Father. Alternatively, within the previously asserted 'unity' and in other writings, she may simply accentuate Christ's distinct individuality. This is obviously a challenging question. However, individuality serves well the purpose of making infinite risk a reality.

White keeps the same hermeneutical approach in a rich commentary-style reflection on Christ's sermon on the mount in Matthew 5-7, published in 1896 with the title *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessings.* She writes that Christ is the Saviour but also the *"*King of kings and Lord of lords. Jehovah Immanuel shall be King over all the earth; in that day shall there be one Lord, and His name one."[91] In this statement, White seems to pair the name Jehovah with that of Immanuel, probably to emphasize even more strongly the union of the divine and human nature of Christ, as the two names have often been understood. Once more, this is substantiated within the same text through the

[87] "Resistance to Light no. 3," ST 29 August 1900, "…there never was a time when He was not in close fellowship with the eternal God."

[88] "The Word Made Flesh," ST 3 May 1899, par 2.

[89] Even if this view may be considered as unconventional from a traditional Christian perspective, White relies on some common understanding of divine statements in the New Testament in reference to Christ. The biblical basis for this identification of Christ with the Old Testament name of God, YHWH, could be seen in various New Testament passages where Jesus is associated with divine attributes and actions. One key biblical basis is found in John's Gospel (ex. John 8:58), where Jesus repeatedly uses the 'I am' statements to assert his divine nature and identity, echoing the divine name revealed to Moses in Exodus 3:14. Furthermore, in John 20:28, the apostle Thomas addresses Christ as "My Lord and my God," directly attributing divine identity to Him. Moreover, in Hebrews 1:8-9, a direct reference to Psalm 45:6-7, Christ is addressed as God, and the attributes of YHWH are ascribed to Him. White's interpretation appears to stem from her understanding of Christ' divine nature and salvific role, which she sees reflected in the Old Testament name of God, YHWH. While this interpretation may be contentious, it illustrates the complexity of theological reflections on the person of Christ and the divine implications associated with His identity.

[90] PP, 305.

[91] MB, 160.

reference to Christ's Incarnation and the fullness of his divinity, as stated in Colossians 2, "This is the reward of all who follow Christ. Jehovah Emmanuel - He in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, 'in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily' (Col. 2:3, 9)."[92]

White further warns about rejecting the full divinity of Christ, "If men reject the testimony of the inspired Scriptures concerning the deity of Christ, it is in vain to argue the point with them; for no argument, however conclusive, could convince them."[93] For White, the biblical evidence is plain; no doubts may and should arise from a correct reading of the Scriptures. Therefore, no attempt to counteract its rejection is necessary. This warning echoes another one written by White just the year before, in 1895, and published in a collection of messages directed to Adventist missionaries: "Our policy is, Do not make prominent the objectionable features of our faith, which strike most decidedly against the practices and customs of the people, until the Lord shall give the people a fair chance to know that we are believers in Christ, that we do believe in the divinity of Christ, and in His pre-existence."[94] These invitations to not create a debate around the question of the divinity of Christ give a glimpse of the context in which White was writing at the end of the 1800s, as it will be further outlined in the research overview.[95]

White's understanding of Christ's divinity seems clear from the early years of her ministry. In 1870, White elaborates a brief comment on the pre-existence of Christ. She writes, in reference to the creation of the angels, that Christ "was one with the Father before the angels were created."[96] If, on the one hand, this affirmation does not provide specific information regarding the existence of Christ, nor about when the angels were created, on the other, it is formulated to highlight the implicit eternity of the Son of God. A few years later, this becomes even clearer when she compares the human life to the divine one, saying, "A human being lives, but his is a given life, a life that will be quenched. What is your life? It is even vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. But Christ's life is not a vapor; it is never-ending, a life existing before the worlds were made."[97]

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[92] Ibid., 57.

[93] Ibid., 524.

[94] TM, 253.

[95] Some features of Adventist theology could be objectionable to some in the late 1800s, as outlined in various contributions to the history of theological development within Adventist traditions. See also 2.1.

[96] 1SP, 17.

[97] "The Life and Light of Men," ST 17 June 1897, 5.

The passage suggests that White's understanding of Christ's divinity emphasizes his eternal existence. By affirming that Christ was "one with the Father before the angels were created," she highlights his pre-existence and implies his timeless nature as the Son of God. The comparison between human life, which is fleeting, and Christ's life, which is described as "never-ending" and existing "before the worlds were made," reinforces the idea of Christ's divine immortality. This view has led Christianity to argue that since Christ's life is eternal and existed before creation, the second person of the Trinity could not have died forever or ceased to exist, even during his human life.

It is evident that White already had a position regarding Christ's eternal nature and personal identity quite early in her theological development. In 1897, she pens a stronger and more explicit statement about the self-existence of Christ and his equal status with the Father: "He was equal with God, infinite and omnipotent. […] He is the eternal, self-existent Son."[98] White inserts this belief, as on many other occasions, within the context of the value of Christ's Incarnation for the redemption of humanity. She talks of the impossibility of angels substituting Christ in the plan of saving humanity. This is due to their life as given by God, which does not allow them to surrender it. Salvation should be a free act of surrender based on the ownership of life. This is possible only for God and, therefore, for Christ. Only Christ, the eternal and self-existent one, according to White, could offer his life willingly because he is the one who has power over his life (John 10:18).[99]

Only two years later, in 1899, among several statements regarding the divine nature of Christ, White affirms, in the official Adventist magazine *The Signs of the Times,* that "His divine life could not be reckoned by human computation. The existence of Christ before His incarnation is not measured by figures."[100] This statement places the question of Christ's existence beyond human intellect and theological speculation, encouraging reflection on the nature of Christ in relation to his Father. The following year (1900), in the same magazine, White makes a plain and very accurate statement about the pre- and self-existence of Christ that agrees perfectly with previous ones while expanding on the topic,

> Christ is the pre-existent, self-existent Son of God... In speaking of his pre-existence, Christ carries the mind back through dateless ages. He assures us that there never was a time when

[98] "The True High Priest," Ms 101, 26 September 1897 (12LtMs, 387-399)

[99] See Ibid.

[100] "The Word Made Flesh," ST 3 May 1899, para. 4.

He was not in close fellowship with the eternal God. He to whose voice the Jews were then listening had been with God as one brought up with Him.[101]

It appears clear that White does not have any doubt regarding the eternal divine nature of Christ. Even more when she states that there was never a time in which Christ was not in close fellowship with God the Father. Therefore, she does not support Arian views, such as that the Son might have been created at a certain point in time. She does not even think of Christ as being 'part' of the Father. She clarifies that Christ is self-existent. Therefore, even if indeed she affirms that "from the days of eternity the Lord Jesus Christ was one with the Father,"[102] she always thinks about the concept of unity as that of intents and close fellowship, but not of 'single substance'.[103] Christ is "the image of God, 'the image of His greatness and majesty, the outshining of His glory,'"[104] but in this sense, he is the visible presence of the divinity. Christ is the means by which divine majesty and glory may be perceived.

White's understanding of the divinity of Christ is always rooted in her view of the Incarnation. Even if Christ was united with his Father, as White says, "from all eternity […] when He took upon Himself human nature, He was still one with God."[105] Christ was God before and after the Incarnation in its purest sense, and at the same time, he was 'with' God, the Father. Thus, it seems possible to read, in the official church newspaper *Review and Herald,* White's attempt to make it very clear that "The Lord Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God, existed from eternity, a distinct person, yet one with the Father. He was the surpassing glory of heaven. He was the commander of the heavenly intelligences, and the adoring homage of the angels was received by him as his right. This was no robbery of God."[106] In these words, several questions seem to be addressed. Christ existed "from eternity." He is a distinct person from the Father. He is one with the Father, in intents and divine nature. He is the visible expression of divine glory. He had a role in the heavenly government. He is worthy of the adoration and homage due only to God, and this does not constitute any form of diminishing the nature of the Father.

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[101] "Resistance to Light, no. 3," ST 29 August 1900, paras 13 and 15.

[102] DA, 19.

[103] On the question of 'single substance' see earlier in this section, and see a more detailed analysis in 3.1.1 and 3.1.3.

[104] DA, 19.

[105] "Christ Our Only Hope," ST 2 August 1905, para. 10.

[106] "The Word Made Flesh," RH 5 April 1906, para. 7.

White bases her views on her biblical hermeneutics, and her theology is indeed biblical. When she talks of Christ's humanity and divinity, she affirms that the Bible speaks of this topic in a decided way. For example, in a comment on John 1, she says that

> while God's Word speaks of the humanity of Christ when upon this earth, it also speaks decidedly regarding his pre-existence. The Word existed as a divine being, even as the eternal Son of God, in union and oneness with his Father. From everlasting he was the Mediator of the covenant, the one in whom all nations of the earth, both Jews and Gentiles, if they accepted him, were to be blessed.[107]

This statement, published in 1906, conveys the biblical character of White's theology. Her Christological views on the humanity and divinity of Christ are at the foundation of her understanding that the divine being known as 'Word' is the eternal Son of God and the Mediator of the covenant. With this reference to the covenant, which cannot but prompt back to think about the God of Abraham and Israel, White highlights Christ's eternal divine nature and redeeming purpose.

Even almost at the close of her life, White still emphasizes the pre-existence of Christ and his salvific life. In 1911, reporting a visionary picture of the after-resurrection and the ascension of Christ into heaven, White says that "when Christ passed within the heavenly gates, He was enthroned amidst the adoration of the angels. As soon as this ceremony was completed, the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples in rich currents, and Christ was indeed glorified, even with the glory which He had with the Father from all eternity."[108] After his death and resurrection, Christ could be welcomed in heaven and glorified with the glory he had from eternity. Thus, the words of John 17:5[109] are perceived as fulfilled at a special ceremony in heaven just preceding the descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles at Pentecost.

Once more, White's Christology is guided by her Soteriological views and rooted in a close-to-the-text biblical theology. In Christ, as the Word of God, "we may learn what our redemption has cost Him who from the beginning was equal with the Father."[110] The Incarnation is the most significant cost divinity has paid for human redemption. Being equal to the Father, Christ makes his

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[107] Ibid., para. 5.

[108] AA, 38-39.

[109] "So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed."

[110] CT, 13.

sacrifice and his assuming human nature a high cost.[111] White writes, "None but the Son of God could accomplish our redemption; for only He who was in the bosom of the Father could declare Him. Only He who knew the height and depth of the love of God could make it manifest. Nothing less than the infinite sacrifice made by Christ in [*sic*] behalf of fallen man could express the Father's love to lost humanity."[112]

White appears to espouse a form of *kenotic* Christology, suggesting a profound lowering and emptying in the Incarnation. This perspective is notably radical, contemplating the possibility of Christ failing, experiencing loss, and facing consequences—an essence encapsulated in the concept of infinite sacrifice. The crucial question revolves around the belief that, as 'truly' human, Christ could sin and die, a conviction White holds. However, a counterargument may arise, asserting that if Christ's humanity was inseparably united with his divinity, the possibility of sin becomes contentious.[113] While White's kenotic view seems to be radical, especially in contemplating eternal separation from the Father in death, her recurrent emphasis on Christ's pre-existence may be seen as suggesting Christ's incapability to sin. If it is true that kenotic Christology is a theological framework that explores the self-emptying or self-limitation of the divine Word (Logos) in the person of Christ, as articulated in Philippians 2:5-11,[114] this theological perspective still grapples with the paradox of Christ's simultaneous divinity and humanity. While it proposes that Christ, in taking on human form, willingly set aside certain divine attributes to fully participate in the human experience, its discussions often revolve around the nature of this self-emptying, with questions about which attributes were laid aside and to what extent. This is where White's view shows its particularity in proposing a kenoticism where even the eternity of Christ's divine nature is questioned in the Incarnation. While kenotic Christology has faced critiques and debates within

[111] "The great gift of salvation has been placed within our reach at an infinite cost to the Father and the Son," in "Peril of Neglecting Salvation," RH 10 March 1891, para. 2; "No man, nor even the highest angel, can estimate the great cost; it is known only to the Father and the Son," BE 28 October 1895, para. 4; "The human family cost God and his Son Jesus Christ an infinite price," SpTEd, 21.

[112] SC, 14.

[113] Whether or not White's concept of hypostatic union may be classified as monohypostatic or dyohypostatic – as she never delves into ideas such as two hypostases, human and divine, in one person, or one blended divine-human hypostasis, or else – it surely advocates that Christ had truly a human person and the union of divine and human makes it possible for the divine person to die.

[114] The term 'kenosis' is derived from the Greek word for 'emptying,' reflecting the idea that the eternal Son voluntarily relinquished certain divine attributes or prerogatives during the Incarnation.

theological circles, it remains a significant lens through which theologians seek to articulate the complexity of the Incarnation.[115]

Within this theological framework, White claims for a union of divine and human natures that allows the possibility of the death of the divinity. In this sense, White's Trinitarian theology and her Christology are actually different from what is generally accepted in mainstream Christianity. If the Trinity remains a mystery and Christology does not shed further light but even more shade on Christ's Incarnation and death, how Christ could die as a divine being is the greatest question that White's infinite risk theology raises. It is undoubtedly impossible to answer the question, how could Christ die eternally? It is an inexplicable reality even for White, but she indeed claims that Christ could also die as a divine person. The divinity is really, in a radical way, hidden during the Incarnation and subjected to humanity. Within this framework of a soteriologically-rooted Christology, Christ's divine nature had to be merged with human nature in a way that, like every human being, Christ could be exposed to all consequences of sin, including eternal death.

The implications of this infinite sacrifice and risk are the object of White's theology even to the very last year of her life. In 1915, she writes that the death of Christ opened a door of hope for fallen humanity, sentenced to death for the transgression of the law of God. Christ died as a malefactor and bore the weight of the "sins upon His divine soul. He descended lower and lower, till there were no lower depths of humiliation."[116] Christ reached the deepest depth of human nature and bore in his divine soul the sins of the fallen race, and "as a member of the human family He was mortal, but as God He was a fountain of life to the world. He could have withstood the advances of death and refused to come under its dominion, but voluntarily He laid down His life that He might bring life

[115] Notable proponents of kenotic Christology in the nineteenth century include theologians like Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), who stressed the importance of Christ's humanity in maintaining genuine religious experience, and Peter T. Forsyth (1848–1921), who explored the implications of Christ's self-limitation for understanding divine love and sacrifice. Other valuable resources may be found in the works of Georg W. F. Hegel (1770–1831), Albrecht Ritschl (1822–1889), and Charles Gore (1853–1932). These theologians, and many others, contributed significantly to the development and articulation of kenotic Christology during the nineteenth century. See the following resources and other more recent re-editions: Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (trans. H. R. Mackintosh; Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1928), Peter T. Forsyth, *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ* (London: Independent Press, 1909); Georg W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (trans. E. B. Speirs; London: George Bell and Sons, 1895); Albrecht Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1870); Charles Gore, *The Incarnation of the Son of God* (London: John Murray, 1891). Various other valuable sources, and authors, on the topic are listed here in later footnotes and the Bibliography.

[116] "The Mighty and Inspiring Conflict," ST 5 January 1915, para. 13.

and immortality to light."[117] For White, Christ was mortal in the Incarnation and came voluntarily under the dominion of death. This implies the possibility of losing his life.

This perspective on what happened on the cross questions the unfolding of its events. Could the Gospel narrative have taken a different course if Christ had sinned? Was there ever a possibility for the divine Son of God to fall and perish eternally? Chalcedonian Christology, with its view of the hypostatic union, claiming that Christ is a person but not a human person and where divinity is always present, would probably negate this possibility. For this kind of hypostatic union, the single hypostasis of Christ is the hypostasis of the Logos. The traditional Trinitarian view, with its view of three persons indivisibly united in one substance, would also reject it.

This leads to the challenging ground of whether Christ could have sinned in His humanity and what this would have meant for his fate after the crucifixion. Another question would be whether sinning could have impacted his divine life and what sin would have meant for his divinity. The prevailing view in Christianity is that Christ could not die in his divinity, only in his humanity. Moreover, it is not a certainty that Christ would not have been resurrected if he had sinned. However, White's view may raise uncertainty regarding whether Christ's resurrection would have been guaranteed if he had sinned. This challenges traditional assumptions.

Hence, White's proposal that the divine Son of God could risk his eternal life and face the possibility of losing himself forever has not been thoroughly evaluated, making it an important task that remains to be undertaken. While the question of the im/peccability of Christ in his human nature has been debated throughout centuries,[118] the notion that Christ as the divine Son of God could have been annihilated if he had sinned has not often followed those debates. Most Christologies think about the death of Christ almost as a pre-determined story with no room for failure. Thus, Christ, as a divine being, was not susceptible to change, nor could he commit sin. His life could not be affected by any potential risk. Therefore, his death on the cross could not have another ending, and his mission to save humanity could not fail. White's ideas challenge these conventional notions.

While many Christologies assert Christ's divinity as immune to change and sin, White's Christology introduces the concept of 'infinite risk,' implying that Christ's sacrifice on the cross was

[117] Ibid., para. 15.

[118] See 2.2.1 and ch.3.

not predetermined and open to potential failure. By exploring the idea that Christ, as the divine Son of God, could have faced eternal death if he had sinned, White invites a fresh perspective on Incarnational theology. This perspective adds depth and complexity to the theological understanding of Christ's sacrifice, highlighting the genuine vulnerability and openness of his mission to save humanity. By engaging with White's ideas, scholars can reexamine long-held assumptions about Christ's divine nature and the significance of his sacrifice, contributing to a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of Christology, God's love, and its implications for Christian theology.

White's view may change the perspectives on the death of Christ and, more broadly, on his sacrifice and the economy of salvation. Understanding this 'infinite risk' has consequences for Trinitarian theology, Incarnation doctrines, Atonement theories, and much more. If Christ could sin and die forever, the dimension of God's love may also assume a grandeur beyond comprehension. The fact that Christ could risk his eternal life and go out of existence would shed a different light on what divinity did to save humanity. Then, the 'infinite risk' would be synonymous with 'infinite cost.' It is in these terms that White describes it when she writes that Christ "has paid so infinite a price"[119] and that "everlasting life has been purchased for man at an infinite cost."[120] In this way, she invites Christians to "stand before the cross of Calvary, and learn from it the cost of redemption."[121]

Without dismissing all valuable scholarly Christological debates[122] but recognizing them as the broad framework for White's disquisition about Christ's fate after a possible sin, other questions will be considered, whether briefly or more extensively, along with the investigation and my conclusions. Therefore, before progressing into White's specific theological concept of infinite risk and engaging with White's 'veiled divinity' model of Incarnation, a review of the existing research on her theological views becomes crucial, particularly within the broader context of Trinitarian and Christological discourse. This will provide a helpful framework for approaching her perspectives and her theology of infinite risk.

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[119] Lt 7, 10 February 1885, para. 22 (to Daniel Bourdeau, a fellow labourer).

[120] "The Perfect Standard," Ms 59, 13 April 1899, para. 17.

[121] "Fragments/Work in the South," Ms 66, 28 July 1901, para. 16.

[122] White surely delves into numerous related theological areas, however this may not be tested or reproduced here against detailed knowledge of all the Christological discussion from Chalcedon and forward. As Evans writes, "Chalcedon leaves many questions open," C. Stephen Evans (ed.), *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 2009), 2. In the same page, Evans gives some examples of open questions in Christological debate.

Chapter 2

White's Theological Contribution: A Comprehensive Overview

2.1 White's Theology: A Research Review

Numerous books have been written about White's life, ministry, writings, and theology authored by scholars both within and outside of Adventism.[123] Her impressive literary output (thousands of articles and numerous books) undoubtedly positions her as one of the most prolific and significant theological figures in nineteenth-century America. However, her theological and biblical insights remain largely unfamiliar outside Adventist circles. As noted in the volume *Ellen Harmon White, American Prophet,* "Little of the discussion of Ellen White reached beyond Adventist boundaries and, therefore, it did not catch the attention of scholars outside the church."[124] Non-Adventist scholars rarely mentioned White until after 1960.

Although White's theology of infinite risk is intimately connected with Christological and Trinitarian doctrines, recent Adventist theological literature has overlooked its implications within these contexts. For instance, the significant volume by the Adventist theologian Norman R. Gulley,[125] *Systematic Theology: God as Trinity,* which offers an extensive exploration of foundational questions regarding the doctrine of God and provides biblical arguments and historical summaries of various views, does not engage with White. It is necessary here to remember also that even if Trinitarian and Christological inquiries are often approached separately, as is also the case for many of the Adventist contributions hereafter listed, they are inseparably intertwined in White's theology of infinite risk to the point that it becomes impossible to understand the risk without approaching somehow both perspectives. While it is understandable that the connection between a Christological approach to the humanity of Christ and its Trinitarian implications is not always explored, the relative independence of Christ's humanity in the Incarnation is strictly linked to the 'tritheistic' shape of Trinitarian theology.

Similarly, the recent work of the Adventist writer Ty Gibson, *The Heavenly Trio,* does not address any specific issue about White's idea that the Son of God could cease to exist as a divine being. The book aims to comprehensively treat the Adventist pioneers' positions on the Trinity. This framed

[123] For a broader discussion on Ellen G. White's biography, ministry, writings, or her role as a prophet, see 1.2.

[124] Aamodt, Land, and Numbers, *Ellen Harmon White: American Prophet,* 334.

[125] Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology God as Trinity* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2011).

contribution takes into consideration also White's view of the Trinity. However, the book seems to rely heavily on the assumption that many, if not all, pioneers were only opposing modalist views of the Trinity, specifically to be protective of the distinct personhood of Christ. As Gibson highlights, it is true that early Adventist theologians had different and, at times, undeveloped views regarding the divinity of Christ and his Incarnation, ranging from Christ being fully divine and somehow distinct from the Father to being a created being. However, Gibson's book does not engage in detail with their views in comparison to mainstream Trinitarian perspectives, relegating the discussion mainly to a disquisition on modalism. For example, there is no engagement with the oneness of God's nature, which is a very relevant element when considering White's theology. As a result, the idea of God as "three distinct persons who are one in nature and character"[126] is not adequately explained, nor is what Gibson defines as "covenantal trinitarianism". Additionally, the concept alluded to by the title, *Heavenly Trio,* is not entirely clarified or does not appear clearly different or distant from conventional trinitarianism, as White would invoke by using it to avoid the term "trinity".

Regarding White's stance on the Trinity, Gibson notes that despite her marriage to a minister from the anti-Trinitarian Christian Connection, White's theological views were not shaped by these beliefs.[127] Gibson argues that White's view of the Trinity evolved from a reserved approach, especially about the relation between the persons, to a clear affirmation of three distinct eternal persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, possessing eternal and underived coexistence. However, Gibson's book does not intend to engage with the trihypostatic concept of traditional Trinitarian doctrine and seems not to offer further insight beyond a generalist view of God existing in an "interpersonal relational dynamic of three distinct persons who are one in love".[128] Gibson presents the unclear positions of many first Adventist leaders who, while correctly emphasizing that Christ was God and somehow distinct from the Father, did not fully develop a trinitarian doctrine affirming

[126] Ty Gibson, *The Heavenly Trio* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2020), 59.

[127] The Christian Connection emerged as a religious movement in the United States during the latter part of the 18th and early 19th centuries. It constituted a gathering of individuals who seceded from established Christian denominations in various locations. These individuals and groups typically adhere to non-Trinitarian beliefs, emphasizing the oneness of God while rejecting the traditional understanding of the Trinity. For a study on the Christian Connection, one may refer to the following books that may touch upon aspects related to it or may provide context on related historical and religious movements: Leonard Allen and Richard T. Hughes, *Discovering Our Roots: The Ancestry of the Churches of Christ* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 1988); Douglas A. Foster, Anthony L. Dunnavant, Paul M. Blowers, et al. (eds) *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement: Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Christian Churches/Churches of Christ, Churches of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), esp. entry on *Christian Connection*.

[128] Ibid., 90.

the distinct personhood of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Gibson underscores White's push against Arianism and pantheism among early Adventist theologians. However, the book does not delve into her infinite risk theology, which might enhance understanding of her Trinitarian stance beyond acknowledging her belief in three distinct persons who live in a relational dynamic of more than one person.

Woodrow Whidden, Jerry Moon, and John Reeve's book, *The Trinity: Understanding God's Love, His Plan of Salvation and Christian Relationships,* is a valuable addition to Adventist and White's Trinitarian perspectives.[129] The authors admit that Adventism often takes the Trinity for granted. The book attempts to trace the doctrine of the Trinity through church history, the Bible, and White's writings. While a valuable addition to Adventist Trinitarian theology, it does not significantly progress in analysing White's Trinity view compared to prior research. Furthermore, it is crucial to note that the book does not engage with the question of infinite risk, nor with how White's theology could align with concepts such as hypostatic union and persons, intra-Trinitarian relationship, impeccability, immutability, God's oneness, essence, and *ousia*. Thus, in a way, Adventist Trinitarian theology is informed by but does not fully reflect or unpack White's views. The book, however, offers a clear statement which I find most persuasive, even if quite general,

> the evidence is also clear that Ellen White recognized at least two major types of Trinitarian belief, one that she consistently opposed all her life, and another that her visions progressively led her to agree with. The view she eventually came to agree with portrays the three members of the Godhead as tangible, personal individuals, living from eternity in union of nature, character, purpose, and love, yet each having an individual identity. This is a simple, biblical view of the Trinity, as contrasted with traditional views based on the presuppositions of Greek philosophy.[130]

The statement, though requiring more analysis, captures well the basic concept of White's position: three members of the Godhead each having an individual identity. However, often within Adventism, there is not a thorough comparison of White's views with mainstream Trinitarian ones or in light of current systematic terminology and debates within Christianity. Most of all, the analysis of White's Trinitarian views is conducted without evaluating the Christological implications raised

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[129] Woodrow Whidden, Jerry Moon, and John Reeve, *The Trinity: Understanding God's Love, His Plan of Salvation and Christian Relationships* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2002).
[130] Ibid., 219.

by her infinite risk theology and often to find a way to align her views with one or another current view instead of thoroughly analysing hers. Thus, in discussing White's Trinitarian views, Adventist scholars have reached different conclusions, and her writings have often been categorized as Trinitarian or anti-Trinitarian, depending on the understanding of what Trinity may mean or the approach to it. Moreover, much attention has been given to evaluating the impact of White's writings on Arian or semi-Arian views within Adventist history and their interplay with an increased phenomenon definable as "neo-Nestorianism", with "binitarian" and "dyadic" views, not always very defined, together with several pneumatological issues. Thus, there is a tendency to gloss over differences between Adventist's and White's tenets and those of the historic Christian theology in favour of aligning views with the dominant ones.

This is substantiated by another pertinent work, Kwabena Donkor's study titled "God is 3 Persons – in Theology," published by the Adventist Biblical Research Institute.[131] Donkor seems to identify an impasse when he says that "the defining characteristic of the Seventh-day Adventist approach to the doctrine of the Trinity is to state dogmatically the biblical positions on the relevant points without any great effort at explaining its logic."[132] Donkor's concern is that there is indeed a lack of effort to explain the 'inner' nature of God, and without proper clarification, the arguments put forth by Arius and afterwards by Eunomius appeared to be fairly persuasive. Earlier in the text, Donkor writes that,

> [t]he traditional formula "one essence, three Persons" is an explicatory concept intended to clarify the nature of the unity, identity, and relations of the three Persons. Absent from the Adventist statement is the ontologically pregnant statement of the Nicene-Constantinople Creed, "Light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, consubstantial with the Father."[133]

Donkor argues that Adventist doctrine appears satisfied to simply proclaim the eternity of the Trinity and then move on to specifics of the three Persons' actions. Thus, no attempt is made to theorise on how the eternal Trinity and their involvement in the economies of creation and redemption are related. Moreover, a straightforward historical interpretation of the biblical text results in the conclusion that the concept of ousia does not drive the Adventist method of

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[131] Kwabena Donkor, "God is 3 Persons – in Theology," *Biblical Research Institute,* Release 9, May 2015.

[132] Ibid., 25.

[133] Ibid., 19.

conceptualising the being of God as one.[134] Donkor is clear about the main elements of Trinitarian doctrine. With a systematic approach and use of appropriate terminology, he claims that "the Adventist doctrine of the Trinity is not, theologically, identical with the traditional Christian doctrine. Adventists, therefore, subscribe to the ecumenical creeds on this doctrine only in their basic affirmation of the triune God, but not to its traditional Christian interpretation."[135] This is why Donkor is convinced that there is a lack of clarity and that "[t]he Adventist doctrine of the Trinity resembles the traditional doctrine only on the surface, but it is radically different in its interpretation or theological formulation."[136] In my opinion, this view holds partial truth. Today, on the one hand, there may be a lack of transparent engagement with the oneness of God in the Adventist 'fundamental beliefs', thus with concepts such as 'one substance, '*ousia*', '*homoousios*', usually used among others to clarify that God is one and not three. On the other, I find it likely that many contemporary Adventist theologians, in official publications, indeed embrace positions that align, to varying degrees, if not entirely, with the Trinitarian doctrine.

Donkor follows his discussion without delving into White's specific views on the Trinity or her infinite risk theology by outlining a Trinitarian concept that he believes White supports. He writes that the Adventist position is a biblical approach to the Trinity that eliminates the "gap between immanent and economic Trinity" and "conceives the Persons as centers of consciousness in opposition to the Christian tradition."[137] As in Whidden, Moon, and Reeve's volume, White recognizes the Godhead as made of three members, tangible, personal individuals, living in a union of purposes, mind, character, and nature, but not in person and having each individual identity.

While there are valuable Adventist contributions concerning the Trinity, they do not significantly progress the discussion of White's views on it, particularly in connection to her infinite risk theology.[138] Hence, for a deeper exploration of White's theology within Adventism, while aware of

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[134] The Adventist theologian Canale, whose views align closely with mainstream Trinity, writes that "Adventism conceives the idea of persons in its biblical sense, as referring to three individual centers of intelligence and action," Fernando Canale, "Doctrine of God," in Raoul Dederen, ed., *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (SDA-Encyclopaedia, Commentary Reference Series, vol. 12; Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), 105–159, esp. 150.

[135] Donkor, "God is 3 Persons – in Theology", 22-23.

[136] Ibid., 29-30.

[137] Ibid., 25.

[138] There are numerous articles (as well as unpublished theses, research papers, and websites) discussing the Trinity within Adventism and or White's writings. I provide here only some valuable examples of published works in the 2000' where further relevant contributions are listed in their bibliographical references: Canale, "Doctrine of God"; Jerry Moon,

its Trinitarian implications, it becomes also necessary to delve into Christological inquiries. Pertinent earlier works can help contextualize the analysis of infinite risk theology.[139] One notable work is Eric C. Webster's *Crosscurrents in Adventist Christology* (1984).[140] Webster's volume comparatively discusses White's Christology by analysing some of the most prominent theologians of past and most recent Adventist history. Of particular interest is the extensive chapter on White's Christology, where the author discusses critical questions on the pre-existence of Christ, his Incarnation and nature, the relation between sin and Christ, and more. In a dedicated section concerning "Kenosis," Webster explores White's viewpoint, asserting that she did not align with modern kenotic theories but upheld a form of *kenosis* consistent with the essence of Philippians 2:6-8.

"The Adventist Trinity Debate Part 1; Historical Overview," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 41 (Spring 2003): 113–129; Idem, "The Adventist Trinity Debate, Part 2: The Role of Ellen G. White," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 41/2 (Autumn 2003): 275–292; Merlin D. Burt, "History of Seventh-day Adventist Views on the Trinity", *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 17/1 (Spring 2006): 125–139; Gerhard Pfandl, "The Doctrine of the Trinity Among Seventh-day Adventists," *Journal of the Adventist Theological* Society, 17/1 (Spring 2006): 160–179; Jerry Moon, "The Quest for a Biblical Trinity: Ellen White's 'Heavenly Trio' Compared to the Traditional Doctrine," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 17.1 (2006): 140-159; Denis Fortin, "God, the Trinity and Adventism," *Perspective Digest* Vol. 15 (2010): Iss. 4, Art.1. Moreover, there are books, in addition to those referenced in this investigation, approaching the theology and history of the doctrine of the Trinity both within and outside Adventist tradition, such as Gerald W. Wheeler, *Is God a Committee?: What the Bible Teaches about the Godhead* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1975); Rolf J. Pöhler, *Continuity and Change in Adventist Teaching: A Case Study in Doctrinal Development* (Frankfurt am Main and New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2000); George R. Knight, *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2000). Many more could be listed, some intended also to address a broader audience, or not published from official Adventist publishers, or self-published, or authored by Adventist members not strictly connected with the scholarly guild of study, but that can still offer a contribution to the overall interest in the doctrine of the Trinity (see Max Hatton, *Understanding the Trinity* Grantham: Autumn House, 2001; Vance Ferrell, *Defending the Godhead,* Altamont, TN: Harvestime Books, 2005; Glyn Parfitt, *The Trinity: What Has God Revealed: Objections Answered*, Warburton, Victoria, Australia: Signs Publishing Company, 2008; and more). Another interesting contribution is a 5-volume series by Russel R. and Colin D. Standish on the doctrine of the Trinity including Christological discussions within Adventist traditions and in the writings of Ellen G White: vol. 1 *The Godhead - One, Two, Three or Four?;* vol. 2 *Our Heavenly Father - In The Age of Terrorism;* vol. 3 *Our Savior: Human, Divine or Human-Divine?;* vol.4 *The Holy Ghost Power or Being?;* vol. 5 *The Godhead in the Spirit of Prophecy* (Rapidan, VA: Hartland Publications, 2010). See Adventist Pacific Union College Library (https://library.puc.edu/heritage/bib-SDAtrin.html) for a comprehensive list of published and unpublished material on the topic such as books, periodicals, document files, and web URLs. The Adventist Digital Library (https://adventistdigitallibrary.org/) offers also a large number of sources on the topic. Some material may also be hosted on http://www.sdanet.org/atissue/trinity/ (SDAnet is a media organization operated in the public interest by members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and not officially by it, though some contributions are clearly labelled as official Seventh-day Adventist Church material).

[139] Other valuable contributions in the area of Christology may be explored through the links in the previous footnote. However, for an overview of the development of the doctrines of the Trinity and Christology in Adventist history, see for example Gilbert Valentine, "A Slice of History: How Clearer Views of Jesus Developed in the Adventist Church," *Ministry*, May 2005: 14-19.

[140] Eric C. Webster, *Crosscurrents in Adventist Christology* (Theology and Religion Series, 6; Berne, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 1984).

Webster examines what White believed Christ set aside in the process of becoming human. However, he does not engage with any aspects of White's infinite risk views.[141] While Webster claims that White does not say that Christ laid aside his divinity, if not only in one instance in her writings,[142] or the attributes of God in the Incarnation, he does acknowledge that White expresses the adoption of human nature as the 'veiling of divinity with humanity'. However, this does not allow Webster to unpack the implications of this Incarnational model. While it is true that White does not advocate a kenotic theory that downplays Christ's divinity, at the same time, the role of the two natures is decisive for an understanding of how she claims that Christ could die as the Son of God. Webster recognizes that in "some definite way Christ's divinity was hidden and did not override His humanity. In some mysterious way, there was a holding back of the powers of divinity."[143] However, it is not entirely clear what that "definite way" is.

Despite the massive number of very valuable quotations from White's writings and various approaches to numerous relevant questions such as the two natures of Christ, Incarnation and Sin, the reality of temptation, and the temptability and peccability of Christ, there is no discussion of White's infinite risk theology in Webster's book. While mentioning White's view on Christ's temptability, albeit without discussion, Webster ultimately avoids delving into the issue and leaves it within the realm of the mystery of the Incarnation by saying that White "states that in the glories of the eternal world we will realize the tremendous sacrifice that Christ made on our behalf and that He 'took the risk of failure and eternal loss' for us."[144] This is, actually, the only place in which Webster presents one of White's statements on the infinite risk, but without any indication of its meanings or implications. Webster seems not to intend to delve into the essence of this statement and does not engage with others where she more directly discusses the death of the Son of God.

While grouping Christology into four categories – Ontological, Speculative, Existential, and Functional – Webster concludes that White has an ontological approach. However, by saying on the

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[141] White seems indeed to follow Philippians 2 where Paul writes about Christ's obedience followed by '*therefore* God exalted him' (διὸ καὶ ὁ θεὸς αὐτὸν ὑπερύψωσεν). This text can be read Incarnationally (it does not have to though), and it also seems to involve a link between Christ's obedience and his exaltation.

[142] "The salvation of souls was the great object for which Christ sacrificed His royal robe and kingly crown, the glory of heaven, and the homage of angels, *and laying aside His divinity*, came to earth to labor and suffer with humanity upon Him," in "A Call to Consecration," RH 21 November 1907, para. 2.

[143] Webster, *Crosscurrents in Adventist Christology,* 84.

[144] Ibid., 95. See also DA, 131, 149; "But our Saviour took humanity, with all of its liabilities. He took the nature of man, with the possibility of yielding to temptation," DA, 117.

last page of the book that it "is possible to hold to the priority of the substitutionary life, death and resurrection of Christ, while still holding to the power of the indwelling Christ and the importance of Christ's example,"[145] it would have been relevant to understand in which way Christ's human life had that priority over the divinity and with which implications. This is not entirely clear in Webster's book, but it is precisely what the infinite risk calls into discussion. Thus, I argue that the question of the infinite risk could have considerably shaped the outcome of Webster's and others' arguments.

Webster's book remains, as others here mentioned, a significant contribution to Christology in Adventism and White's theology. However, the infinite risk concept might not have been intended to be central to the discussions. Therefore, though Adventism has indeed attempted to address significant elements of White's Christology, which could be pertinent to examine the perspective of infinite risk, such as Webster's exploration of sin and temptablity, there has been no endeavour to thoroughly investigate the potential scenario of the Son of God's death.

As the human nature of Christ remains a controversial topic within Adventism, Whidden's *Ellen White on the Humanity of Christ* [146] diligently gathers a considerable number of White's pronouncements concerning this subject and examines how her perspective evolved or narrowed in response to the changing issues and needs of the developing Seventh-day Adventist Church. Thus, Whidden's attempt to effectively interpret her teachings on this matter is certainly valuable. The presence of this comprehensive collection alone makes this book an essential resource to reconstruct White's Christological views. While Whidden elucidates that White believes in Christ possessing both divine and human nature, he never quotes any of her statements on the infinite risk, thus leaving this very relevant element out of White's Christological picture.

The same is true for other relevant contributors to the question of Christ's humanity, such as Herbert Douglass.[147] Both Whidden and Douglass, for example, acknowledge the possibility of

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[145] Webster, *Crosscurrents in Adventist Christology,* 452.

[146] Woodrow W. Whidden, *Ellen White on the Humanity of Christ* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1997). Whidden has authored more than twenty-five publications from late 1980's to recent time. A full bibliography is collected in a recent doctoral thesis by Cyril Marshall, *An Analysis of the Use of the Writings of Ellen G. White in the Views of Herbert Douglass and Woodrow Whidden on the Human Nature of Christ* (unpublished, Andrews University, 2022).

[147] Herbert Douglass has authored a massive number of around eighty publications from 1960 to recent time, though not all focused on Christology or the human nature of Christ from White's perspective. A full bibliography in chronological order is collected in Marshall, *An Analysis of the Use of the Writings of Ellen G. White in the Views of Herbert Douglass and Woodrow Whidden on the Human Nature of Christ*.

reading White's writings with a dual emphasis on elements from both prelapsarian and postlapsarian perspectives. Both sides of the debate have used White's writings to support their positions, which continues to generate considerable discussion within Adventism. However, while Douglass acknowledges this dual emphasis in theory, he does not give it significant weight in his practical interpretation. In contrast, Whidden not only recognizes this dual emphasis in theory but also incorporates it in his practical approach. Consequently, they come to different conclusions on the human nature of Christ. Upon initial examination, it may seem that the infinite risk theology remains unaffected by views regarding whether Christ assumed pre- or post-lapsarian humanity. However, the inclusion of post-lapsarian humanity introduces a significant aspect, namely 'mortality'. This element seems crucial in White's theology of infinite risk, as she emphasizes Christ's assumption of a fallen postlapsarian nature.

In this line of thought, Douglass, in a publication jointly authored with Leo Van Dolsonm, writes that there is no biblical support to the idea that "Jesus was protected from the clamor of humanity's fallen nature, that He never did risk all in fighting the battle of faith as every son and daughter of Adam has to fight it."[148] Even if Douglass does not further develop the concept of 'risk', it is relevant to highlight that the statement suggests that Christ, as the Son of God, was not somehow shielded or protected from experiencing the full weight and struggles of human fallen nature. The statement compares Christ's experience with that of every other human being, implying that the battle of faith and the risks involved in maintaining faith are unique to humanity's fallen condition. This perspective contrasts the idea that Christ had a unique advantage or immunity from the inherent fallen nature of humanity. It suggests that Christ, though sinless and divine, faced the same challenges in his relationship with God or his faith journey. In fact, Douglass believes that,

> [i]f Christ had a special power which it is not the privilege of a man to have, Satan would have made capital of this matter .... We are led to make wrong conclusions because of erroneous views of the nature of our Lord. To attribute to His nature a power that it is not possible for man to have in his conflicts with Satan, is to destroy the completeness of his humanity.[149]

Douglass emphasizes the belief that Christ, as a human being, did not possess any special powers or abilities beyond what was available to humankind. In this sense, Christ is a model. He also

[148] Herbert Douglass and Leo Van Dolsonm, *Jesus—The Benchmark of Humanity* (Nashville, TN: Southern, 1977), 33.
[149] Ibid., 40.

suggests that if Christ had possessed any extraordinary powers that ordinary humans do not have, Satan would have exploited this fact during his temptations and conflicts with Christ. Douglass further argues that incorrect understandings of Christ's nature can lead to wrong conclusions. Thus, he cautions against attributing to Christ powers or abilities that are not within the realm of human possibility, especially in the context of his battles against Satan, as this would undermine the essential completeness of Christ's humanity. In a way familiar to White, this viewpoint emphasizes the full humanity of Christ and rejects the notion that he possessed supernatural or extraordinary powers that would compromise his status as a 'true' human being. It asserts that Christ's victory over Satan was achieved within the limitations of human nature, serving as an example for other human beings to follow.

Douglass is very clear on White's emphasis on the weak and fallen humanity assumed by Christ in the Incarnation. Thus, he strongly argues for the need to be able to fail in order to be truly both an example and the Saviour by echoing White's words that,

> He could not have been tempted in all points like as man is tempted had there been no possibility of his failing. [...] Unless there is a possibility of yielding, temptation is no temptation. Temptation comes and is resisted when man is powerfully influenced to do a wrong action and, knowing that he can do it, resists by faith, with a firm hold upon divine power. This was the ordeal through which Christ passed. In His closing hours, while hanging upon the cross, He experienced to the fullest extent what man must experience when striving against sin. He realized how bad man may become by yielding to sin. He realized the terrible consequence of the transgression of God's law, for the iniquity of the whole world was upon Him.[150]

White's statement conveys here the idea that true temptation only exists when there is a genuine possibility of succumbing to it. Temptation occurs when a person is strongly influenced or enticed to engage in a wrongful action but consciously resists while being able to give in to the temptation. Therefore, White explains that Christ went through this same ordeal in His final hours, particularly while being crucified. Thus, Christ experienced the intense struggle against sin that all humans face and understood the potential depths of depravity to which humanity can sink if they yield to sin. Most importantly, Christ could also grasp the severe consequences that arise from transgressing

[150] "Sacrificed for Us," Ms 29, 17 March 1899, para. 11.

God's law, as he bore the weight of the iniquity of the entire world upon Himself. This passage highlights the depth of Christ's identification with human nature, as Douglass' book tries to explain. White portrays Christ as not only sympathetically understanding the challenges of temptation but also personally experiencing its weight, enduring the full extent of human temptation and the grave consequences of yielding to it.

Douglass reiterates the concept of risk, though without development when elaborating on the text of Hebrews 2:16-18[151] to further emphasise the question of Christ's being subject to the weaknesses of humanity. He says that "[t]hese verses recognize in Jesus all the risks resident in assuming human nature."[152] Douglass seems to suggest that Hebrews acknowledges and affirms that Christ willingly undertook all the inherent risks associated with taking on human nature. While he does not expand on this idea, he exceptionally quotes twice a very emblematic statement of White's on the infinite risk when the Father permitted the Son to come into this world "subject to the weakness of humanity. He permitted Him to meet life's peril in common with every human soul, to fight the battle as every child of humanity must fight it, at the risk of failure and eternal loss."[153] Although Douglass' argument implies that by assuming human form, Christ voluntarily embraced the vulnerabilities, limitations, and uncertainties that come with being human, including its risks and challenges, there is no discussion of what that risk may be. Douglass does not clarify if by Christ exposing himself to "all the risks resident in assuming human nature", and by quoting White's infinite risk view, he means more than physical suffering, emotional pain, rejection, temptation, and ultimately the risk of death on the cross. There is no mention of the death of divinity, as White would argue.

Douglass's book constitutes a contribution to the question of how Christ's assumption of human nature demonstrated his profound humility and empathy in experiencing first-hand the fragility and imperfections of human existence with its struggles and trials. While not advancing the argument

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[151] Hebrews 2:16-18 "For it is clear that he did not come to help angels but the descendants of Abraham. Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested." All Scripture quotations are taken from the (NRSV) New Revised Standard Version (Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, 1989), unless otherwise noted.

[152] Douglass and Dolsonm, *Jesus—The Benchmark of Humanity*, 31.

[153] DA, 49.

of a hypothetical situation where Christ might have sinned, Douglass emphasizes the depth of Christ's identification with humanity.

About twenty years later, Donald Short's contribution does not advance the question of the infinite risk either. However, it provides some further valuable notes.[154] Short writes that,

> Christ traversed the entire terrain of our depravity and conquered it—not without pain and terrible risk, but without defilement. The risk that God took in the creation of this world and in sending Christ in human flesh to redeem it must be understood and appreciated. The peril and risk that a tightrope walker takes can be seen by anyone, whether he falls or not. The path that Jesus trod had such a risk but He did not fall.[155]

Short highlights the profound nature of Christ's mission and the significance of his redemptive work. Thus, he conveys that Christ, in his Incarnation as a human being, fully experienced and triumphed over the entire range of human depravity and sin, and he did it despite facing pain and great risk. Even if the statement emphasizes the inherent risk that God undertook in creating the world and that of Christ to redeem it, there is no further elaboration or connection with White's thinking. It calls for a deep understanding and appreciation of the magnitude of this risk, but without saying what that risk is. However, drawing an analogy, Short likens the peril and risk to that of a tightrope walker, where the observer can perceive the danger regardless of whether the walker falls or not. Similarly, Christ embarked on a path filled with risk, yet he remained steadfast and did not succumb to sin. However, it seems logical to think that Christ could have fallen from that tightrope. But, it is not said what that could have meant.

Short deals again with the question of sin and risk but without adding any specific clarification when he says that "more than this, friendship is a risk. It entails a benevolent comprehension of mutual vulnerabilities and weaknesses […] Christ's weakness and vulnerability revolve around His 'laying down His life for His friends' […] so we must understand how much God has risked for our friendship."[156] While discussing Christ's humanity, Short's analogy of a friendship suggests that one of Christ's manifestations of vulnerabilities and weaknesses was seen in his act of willingly sacrificing his life and undertaking some sort of "risk" for the sake of his friends as the ultimate expression of

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[154] Donald Short, *Made Like His Brethren* (Paris, OH: Glad Tidings Publishers, 1991).

[155] Short, *Made Like His Brethren,* 101.

[156] Ibid., 156.

his love and selflessness. Overall, this perspective portrays Christ's weakness and vulnerability as central aspects of his redemptive mission and expression of divine love for humanity. As in previous cases, there is no connection with White's infinite risk theology nor an elaboration on the question of 'risk'.

A last contribution to consider is Jean R. Zurcher's *Touched With Our Feelings: A Historical Survey of Adventist Thought on the Human Nature of Christ* (1999).[157] The author dedicates his volume to analysing the theological developments of the Adventist Church from its early years – when there were different beliefs among its leaders regarding the nature of Christ, such as that he was not eternal and had a beginning in time or that he was born with a fallen nature – to more traditional views in its later stages. Zurcher supports a post-lapsarian view of Christ's humanity and thus explores both biblical and historical data within Adventism on this belief. In essence, the book argues for a renewed understanding of Christ's nature, emphasizing that Christ experienced the limitations and challenges associated with human nature while remaining sinless. He dedicates one chapter to White's Christological views, though with no treatment of White's infinite risk theology. The real contribution of the book is in vigorously highlighting the post-lapsarian state of Christ's humanity in the Incarnation.[158] Zurcher's analysis of White's views leads him to the conclusion that "Christ's participation in the full and complete human nature in its fallen status is set forth by Ellen White as the sine qua non for man's salvation."[159] By "full and complete human nature", Zurcher means that Christ assumed a real human nature with all its weaknesses and challenges as every other human being. Zurcher makes his case strong through a consistent and rich use of White's writings, often listed but not discussed. There is value in Zurcher's work, especially regarding the

[157] Jean R. Zurcher, *Touched With Our Feelings: A Historical Survey of Adventist Thought on the Human Nature of Christ* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1999).

[158] Questions may be raised about White's view on universal sin, the sinful state of postlapsarian humanity, or even the role of the virgin birth, and more. Answers would probably be helpful, though risking to extend this investigation beyond its focus. However, the following chapters may contribute to clarify some of these issues. Here, it may be said that White acknowledges that Adam's sin had lasting effects on his descendants, leading them to be born with inherent tendencies towards disobedience. However, terms like "original sin" with their Augustinian connotations do not align well with her perspective. Conversely, the notion that humans enter the world morally neutral or inherently good does not seem to align with her understanding of sin. While she used the term "original sin" only once, she closely aligned with Arminian or Wesley's views on human depravity. She was clear that Adam's original sin echoes itself in the corruption of human nature, but individual guilt arises from personal sinful choices. Ultimately, White saw all humans as transgressors of the law. The most reasonable inference is that she approached these concepts from a practical standpoint rather than a theoretical one.

[159] Zurcher, *Touched With Our Feelings,* 58.

emphasis on Christ's human nature in its post-Adamic status and temptability. This resolves into quoting some key statements of White, especially in two sections of the books – "A Human Nature in a Fallen State" and "Tempted in Every Way, Just as We Are",[160] such as (in chronological order) "He humbled Himself, and took mortality upon Him";[161] "If he did not have man's nature, He could not have been tempted as man has been. If it were not possible for Him to yield to temptation, He could not be our helper";[162] "It is a mystery that is left unexplained to mortals that Christ could be tempted in all points like as we are, and yet be without sin";[163] "The temptations to which Christ was subjected were a terrible reality…If this were not so, if it has not been possible for Him to fall, He could not have been tempted in all points as the human family is tempted";[164] "Think of Christ's humiliation. He took upon himself fallen, suffering human nature, degraded and defiled by sin";[165] "Laying aside His royal crown, He condescended to step down step by step, to the level of fallen humanity."[166]

Even without specific elaboration in Zurcher's book, these statements already portray a very specific picture of the Incarnation. It is of particular interest to note White's emphasis on the process of the Incarnation as a 'stepping down' to the very level of humanity, the possibility to be tempted and fall,[167] and the assumption of a nature fallen, degraded, and defiled by sin. Although Zurcher does not ever mention White's view on the infinite risk, he does quote White's clear statements on the possibility of Christ's falling and on his taking "mortality upon him[self]". In White's perspective, the assumption of 'mortality' not only suggests the potential for human death, regardless of committing sin, but also the possibility for the divine Son of God to experience mortality and face eternal death. This appears to be confirmed by another statement penned by White and cited in Zurcher's book,

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[160] Ibid., 56-60.

[161] "Christ Man's Example," RH 5 July 1887, para. 5.

[162] "How to Meet a Controverted Point of Doctrine," RH 18 February 1890, para.6. (also published in 1SM 408).

[163] Lt 8, 9 February 1895 (to 'W.L.H. Baker').

[164] "Against Principalities and Powers," YI 26 October 1899.

[165] "Christ Humiliation," YI 20 December 1900.

[166] "His Wonderful Love," in *General Conference Bulletin* 23 April 1901.

[167] Zurcher also mentions, along the same line, this very important statement of White, "Many claim that it was impossible for Christ to be overcome by temptation. Then He could not have been placed in Adam's position; He could not have gained the victory that Adam failed to gain. If we have in any sense a more trying conflict than had Christ, then He would not be able to succor us. But our Saviour took humanity, with all its liabilities. He took the nature of man, with the possibility of yielding to temptation. We have nothing to bear which He has not endured," DA, 117.

> The Son of God in His humanity wrestled with the very same fierce, apparently overwhelming temptations that assail men — temptations to indulgence of appetite, to presumptuous venturing where God has not led them, and to the worship of the god of this world, to sacrifice an eternity of bliss for the fascinating pleasures of this life.[168]

Zurcher's use of White's statement here points directly to the possibility for Christ "to sacrifice an eternity of bliss for the fascinating pleasures of this life". Even if there is no mention of a risk in this statement, the language and content are strictly linked to White's theology of infinite risk. It suggests that Christ willingly faced the possibility of sacrificing an eternity of perfect happiness for the temporary and captivating pleasures found in this present life. It implies that the allure and enjoyment of worldly experiences could have been so attractive to Christ that he could be tempted to forego his eternal life.

In the end, Zurcher realizes that White never treated the subject of Christ's humanity "as a whole in a systematic manner. This is a source of difficulty. Among her 120,000 manuscript pages, her statements on the human nature of Christ number in the hundreds. Moreover, depending on the circumstances and the specific point under consideration, the same concepts are sometimes presented so differently that they may sometimes appear contradictory."[169] Thus, it is crucial to contextualize her statements and try to approach them as a whole.

Thus, if White shares Christological positions widely accepted, such as Christ's divine preexistence and eternal nature or his post-lapsarian nature in the Incarnation, which may seem to align with the orthodox Christian belief in the divinity and Incarnation of Christ, she also holds the view that Christ's humanity was capable of experiencing the same limitations, weaknesses, and temptations that humans face, to the point of being temptable, able to sin and cease to exist, as it will be analysed in the following chapters. His divinity did not shield Christ's human nature; actually, divinity could pay the consequences of being human if Christ had sinned.

However, the key unexplored question remains how White moves from Christ could have sinned, in a fallen and temptable human nature, to Christ would not have been resurrected and would have died in his divinity. For most mainstream theologians, these consequences may seem counterintuitive. After all, the Son is fully divine and thus possesses perfections such as eternity and

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[168] 1SM 95.

[169] Zurcher, *Touched With Our Feelings,* 57.

immutability as part of his being. Therefore, he cannot go out of existence. Even theologians keen to emphasise the hypostatic union, such as Cyril of Alexandria or Luther, would express it by saying things like 'God suffered and died in his humanity.' But, for White, the peccability of Christ leads to an even greater dramatic consequence, his divine death, and the reasons for her theological position may not appear always clear.

Even if Adventist and Christian traditions, more broadly, have discussed whether Christ, in his human nature, could have sinned, this has not drawn the conclusions that White has. This is because, as Christianity generally holds the view that Christ is like God in his divinity, it does not make sense somehow to think that he could lose that identity. Therefore, one can hardly make sense of how White could move from the concept that Christ could have sinned to that of a closed tomb with no resurrection to that of his eternal death as a divine being. These three concepts are crucial to her infinite risk theology. However, it is not easy to explain what brings White to these conclusions as she never exactly explains why she comes from Concept 1 to Concept 2 and then Concept 3. She does not always explain why she comes to a particular conclusion, or this does not appear immediately clear from what she writes. However, it seems evident to her that Christ could have sinned, which would have led to clear consequences and a closed tomb.

While it is true that the later dogmatic language sees Christ's raising from the tomb as an act he did himself, New Testament language often points to the fact that God the Father resurrected Christ from the sleep of death. In this biblical view, White's idea that the tomb could remain closed if Christ had sinned would then find a rich soil to grow. The Philippians' language is undoubtedly supportive of this when Paul talks of Christ's obedience to the Father and how the Father exalted him (Philippians 2). In using the language of the Incarnation, White holds a certain close-to-the-text biblical view. She uses a sort of paradigm of Christ as existing in all eternity but positioning himself in a "vulnerable" condition as a divine being by means of the Incarnation.

White does not write to explain what brings a concept to the other. Her fragmentary systematic theology material is often hortatory, though also to instruct the church. Her approach to what could have happened if Christ had sinned seems to follow a logical sequence that sees death as the direct outcome of sin and the Incarnation as a 'complete' assumption of human nature with all its weaknesses. Probably, one of the main issues behind it, which forms the very basis of her theology, is the fact that she has a different Christological and Trinitarian understanding from mainstream

Chalcedonian and Nicean creeds, as it has been shown so far and will further be an object of discussion in the following sections and chapters.

The contributions examined so far are exemplary, not exhaustive, of Christological and Trinitarian debates within the Adventist tradition. Furthermore, the focus of this investigation is not precisely the Trinitarian or Christological views of White or their reception and elaboration within Adventism, but her theology of infinite risk, though strictly linked to these doctrinal frameworks. Nevertheless, the necessary theological and doctrinal exploration in this section has offered a perspective on White's theology, especially from within her tradition. It has also highlighted the absence of a comprehensive investigation into her infinite risk scenario, indicating a lack of interest in this aspect. This is furthermore highlighted by the fact that the only substantive theological engagement with Ellen White's infinite risk theology, especially in a period close to White's life, is notably a brief reference to it in a study authored by the Adventist theologian Charles Smull Longacre (1871-1958) in 1947.[170] This is a relevant exception that will find a discussion at the end of this investigation, especially in light of Longacre's move beyond White's theology of infinite risk, and in order to appreciate Longacre's authenticity as a reader and interpreter of White's writings and theology.[171] This undeniably highlights a substantial lacuna in the reception of Ellen White's infinite risk theology, which is furthermore accentuated by her prophetical role within Adventism. Consequently, it becomes imperative and crucial to address this issue, as it unequivocally warrants the scholarly contribution of this research.

Therefore, this analysis has revealed that though White holds distinctive Trinitarian and Christological views that have greatly influenced the beliefs and teachings of the Adventist movement, her positions do not always align with Adventist and Christian theology more broadly. Various Adventist theologians have infused efforts to study and clarify Adventists' and White's positions on these topics, not without theological views diverging in some respect from each other and White. Thus, many other valuable Adventist contributions could here be mentioned, though the selection of sources may always be very objective. Nevertheless, this investigation is only tangentially intersecting with Trinitarian doctrine in Adventist tradition, and the primary purpose is

[170] Charles S. Longacre, "The Deity of Christ," paper presented to the Bible Research Fellowship (Angwin, CA, January 1947).

[171] See 6.1.2 Reading Beyond White's Theology of Infinite Risk.

to create a foundation for discussing White's infinite risk theology. Thus, the selected sources mentioned or referenced here may already serve the purpose.

However, it is relevant to highlight that while Adventist theologians discuss different Trinitarian and Christological views still today, the official Adventist position is crystallized in its 'principles of faith'. Therefore, I see it necessary here, while concluding this section, to remember how current Adventist stands are generally raising elements of contradiction with White's view of the infinite risk and its Trinitarian and Christological implications. The fundamental belief of the Seventh Day Adventist Church today says that "there is one God" who is "a unity of three coeternal Persons", and the statement refers to these three persons with the singular pronouns "he" and "his."[172] This at least implies, if not openly teaches, that God is one Divine Being of indivisible essence. The Adventist theologian Fernando Canale seems to support this view, saying that "The 'oneness' of God refers to the singleness of his being."[173] The same is confirmed by another Adventist theologian, Ekkehardt Mueller, who writes that "The three persons share one indivisible nature [...] each person of the Godhead is inseparably connected to the other two."[174] Thus, it seems that the doctrinal history of Adventism in reference to the Trinity doctrine has progressively moved towards an alignment with current mainstream views. In this case, this is a movement away from White's views and, probably, from Adventist views expressed in earlier belief statements.

Moreover, the concept of an inseparable divine substance is directly in opposition to the idea that sin could have brought the death of the eternal Son of God, as White strongly believes. Facing what appears to be a theological contradiction, Canale, Mueller, and other Adventist theologians would disagree with both the idea that Christ could sin and, most of all, that he could have lost his divine existence and be forever separated from the Father. White would argue instead that "Christ's

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[172] Fundamental belief n.2: "There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal 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" (http://www.sdanet.org/atissue/doctrines/gc27.htm). See, Jarnes David, and Kenneth Wade (eds.), *Seventh-day Adventists Believe...A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (Hagerstown, MD; Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1988), 16. The term "Adventist" refers here more broadly to the theological tradition extant in the belief of the Seventh Day Adventist Church. There exist other Adventist smaller-scale-denominations not always sharing the same doctrinal stands.

[173] Canale, "Doctrine of God," 121.

[174] Ekkehardt Mueller, "Scripture Applied, - A Bible Study," *Reflections, Newsletter of the Biblical Research Institute* (July 2008), 9. Mueller is currently an Associate Director of the Seventh-day Adventist Biblical Research Institute.

humanity could not be separated from His divinity,"[175] meaning that he risked his divine nature by taking on a fully human nature. Even if this concept poses a significant theological dilemma, White is confident that if Christ had sinned as a human being, it would have undermined his role as the sinless Saviour and his divine nature, which is intrinsically sinless and incapable of sinning, could not be separated from his humanity with its consequences. Any sin in Christ's humanity, even if apparently contradicting the most accepted view of the hypostatic union, would have affected the inseparably joined divine nature. In essence, if Christ had sinned, the theological implications would have been profound and complex. It would have called into question his divine nature, the efficacy of his sacrificial death on the cross, the possibility of redemption for humanity, and ultimately, the Godhead.

In order to discuss how Christ could take an 'infinite risk' in the Incarnation and the role played by his human nature, it is necessary at this stage to approach a general overview of some of the most relevant theological challenges, the 'peccability of Christ' and the interaction of the two natures. White's idea that the Son of God risked his life finds its sense only if he could sin. If the Son of God incarnate, Christ, is peccable (could commit sin), then he could be subjected to death, which could be the end of his existence. This subject will also be approached specifically from White's perspective in the next chapter. However, laying out some fertile ground for further development is essential here.[176]

2.2 Perspectives on Christ's Nature

Throughout Christianity, the divinity and humanity of Christ have seen competing proposals that, at times, diminished one or the other.[177] Following the numerous Christological debates around the Incarnation of the Son of God, certain orthodox boundaries have been placed in response to 'misguided' formulations.[178] However, the long and complex debates are evidence of the difficulty

[175] "Christ and the Law," ST 14 April 1898, para. 6.

[176] See 3.1.4 "A Temptable and Peccable Christ."

[177] Various standpoints regarding the two natures have been judged as not in harmony with the Biblical teaching and the understanding of the majority of Christians (e.g. Docetism, Apollinarianism, Ebionitism, Arianism, etc.). Various proposals to understand how the two natures could 'co-exist' have been dismissed as unacceptable (e.g. Nestorianism, Eutychianism, etc.).

[178] Several centuries of theological argumentation decisively stated that Christ is fully divine and fully human, without confusion and separation of the two natures. Chalcedonian Christology (451 CE) articulated the boundaries of the doctrine. Among the boundaries set by the traditional approach to the relationship between the two natures, there is

of defining the relationship between the two natures. Because of this, many questions remain open beyond the Chalcedonian definition regarding the basic truth of God incarnate. In a sense, the Chalcedonian definition eliminated, to a certain degree, a number of incorrect theological arguments. Still, at the same time, it prepared the stage anew for disputes regarding the ways and means God 'became human'.[179]

2.2.1 Christ's Peccability

Certainly, within a Chalcedonian framework, it is hard to see how the sin of Christ's humanity (even if that was seen as possible) could affect his divinity. A relevant issue for the argument of the infinite risk in White's Christology is the apparent incongruity between divine impeccability and human temptability. This highlights the fact that White may have a different perception of what happens at the Incarnation, as previously discussed, and that does not align entirely with Chalcedon. Generally, the prominent theological position in Christianity is that Christ was sinless (did not commit sin) and impeccable (could not commit sin) by, among various options or reasons, innate impeccability, divinization, divine hegemony, empowering grace, and created grace.[180] This concept is strengthened by the Trinitarian view of the immutability of the nature of God, which also entails the idea that the hypostatic persons of the triune God may not be divisible (indivisibility). In fact, the question of Christ's peccability entails another challenge: if the Son of God incarnate is able to sin, then he should also be somehow 'mutable;' his divine nature should be open to a sort of 'change.'

The debate about the possibility of Christ to sin, from a historical and theological perspective, has always oscillated between two main views, often expressed in Latin with the words *non posse*

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the concept of 'without confusion.' Scholars have tried, more or less satisfactorily, to explain the potential incongruities of divinity and humanity by keeping a degree of distinction between the two natures in two conditions of existence. In this sense, for example, as the divine Son, he is all-powerful and immortal, while as a human being he is instead subjected to weaknesses and death. Despite a wide agreement with the traditional view, many Christological problems have proven to be difficult to explain adequately. This is why not all theologians have been convinced that the doctrine is coherent.

[179] Morris addresses some philosophical objections to the Incarnation such as the incoherence of the numerical identity of Christ and God. See Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986).

[180] Crisp argues that a number of contemporary theologians deny that Christ is impeccable (incapable of sinning), opting instead for the thesis that Christ was only sinless (he could have sinned, but did not). He argues in favour of the traditional claim that Christ is impeccable. Oliver D. Crisp, "Was Christ Sinless or Impeccable?" *Irish Theological Quarterly* 77.2 (2007): 168-186.

peccare, unable to sin (the impeccability view), and *posse non peccare,* able not to sin (the peccability view). However, sometimes this status is also rendered with a non-negation-statement-structure as *posse peccare,*[181] able to sin, which – though it seems to mean exactly the opposite of *posse non peccare* – in reality, expresses the same concept of the possibility of sin out of a free choice, differently from an innate inability to sin, as for *non posse peccare*.[182] The first view would mean that Christ could not sin (impeccability), while the second that he was able to refrain from sinning though he could have sinned (peccability). Both views affirm that Christ was sinless, as he did not ever sin, but one is opposed to the other, and they discuss whether Christ could have but did not sin or whether he could not have sinned (or he did not because he could not have). The sinless perfection of Christ's life is not challenged; the controversy concerns the question of whether, as a fully human being, he could have sinned if he wanted to. Although the positions mentioned above, expressed with articulated Latin definitions, have encountered various degrees of interpretation, I intend, at this stage, to offer a general overview of the concept of the im/peccability of Christ to frame the point of view of White regarding what would have happened to the Son of God if in his humanity he could have sinned.

Surveying Christian history up to the present time, though no council addressed it directly, reveals that the *non posse peccare* – impeccability view – has found larger support and squared more broadly with historical theology. However, this approach does not find support in White's Christology. The next chapter will further analyse this point. Indeed, a different perspective, like that of White, would have a major impact on many Christological and Trinitarian doctrines. Nevertheless, even 'peccability theologians' have not dared to discuss what could have happened if Christ had sinned, nor have they thought of addressing the implications for the related divine attribute of immutability and connected ones such as indivisibility.

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[181] At times, this Latin definition is applied only to all the human beings, except Christ. For a discussion on these definitions and the four conditions of human life (before the Law, under the Law, under the Grace, in Peace) in the works of Augustine (esp. *De diversis quaestionibus octaginta tribus,* liber unus 66.3 [ed. Almut Mutzenbecher; Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina 44A; Turnhout: Brepols, 1975], and *Expositio quarundam propositionum ex epistula apostoli ad Romanos,* 13-18 [ed. Johannes Divjak; CSEL 84; Vienna: Tempsky, 1971]) see William S. Babcock, "Augustine's Interpretation of Romans (AD 394-396)," *Augustinian Studies* 10 (1979): 55-74.

[182] Other concepts have been developed, as for example in Augustine the concept expressed with the words *non posse non peccare* (i.e. not able not to sin) in reference the impossibility of not committing sin of the condition of the natural man after the 'fall'.

There is an evident contrast between the divine inability to be tempted and the human vulnerability to temptations. In light of this, it becomes obvious to ask, 'How could God incarnate experience temptation with its struggles?' 'How could he surrender to sin?' A common answer is that Christ could be tempted only in his humanity, and, in a sense, this is evidence that the Son of God truly assumed a human nature and that he was immutable in his divine nature. If temptation becomes a marker of his humanity, sinlessness by nature or status (and not by accomplishment) may indicate his divinity. One may assume that temptability also entails peccability, and debates have seen the possibility of choosing sin as a necessary condition to experience temptation as a full human experience. Considering the fixed point that God is impeccable and always chooses good, is also God incarnate impeccably and immutably choosing good?

In a certain way, this reasoning presents mutually exclusive ideas. How can the Son of God be human in the Incarnation and then not be peccable as any other human being? And if he is peccable, then a change to divine nature may be implied in the picture. The Bible states, in Hebrews 4:15, that Christ was tempted in everything as humans are, yet without sin, and this is exactly why he can sympathize with the weaknesses of humanity. This is furthermore evident by the fact that the author of Hebrews supports this claim through the experience of Christ in Gethsemane fighting and suffering to be obedient to the Father's will without any form of mitigation coming from his divine nature. [183] Therefore, how can he be tempted if he is impeccable? What a praiseworthy accomplishment would there be if he could not sin? If Christ is an example for all Christians, how can he be a credible example for others who are not 'divinely immune' to sin? Can his temptation be understood as the struggle to choose among only good options and not evil ones? Could human peccability limit his divine impeccability? Could his divine impeccability be extended to his humanity? Could his human peccability influence his divine impeccability?

This problematic set of questions is at the basis of the Christological problem of how to reconcile coherently the affirmation that Christ was fully divine and human. These and many other moral, philosophical, and theological questions will probably continue to puzzle scholars. The variety of answers produced in Christian history shows the complicacy and complexity of the problem.[184]

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[183] See Hebrews 4:7-8.

[184] Often, the rejection of the concept of peccability in Christ's human nature is the result of the fear that this would call into doubt even his divine impeccability (and also his divine immutability). Peccability may be considered, to a certain degree, as essential to human freedom in its fallen state.

However, theologians have traditionally affirmed Christ's sinlessness as the expression of his impeccability. This may seem to alienate him from human experience and choice. The claim of Christ's impeccability could also be perceived as nullifying his role as a pattern to follow, one who has been living a human experience as everyone lives. Reformulating the doctrine of God to include peccability would surely trouble many, though others would see it less problematic to think of a more humanized Christ able to sin or to be weak despite his divinity.[185]

Thus, theologians and philosophers have looked into the mystery of God becoming human with great interest. However, it becomes evident that today, the question raises only a minor concern among scholars and Christians, whether Christ had or not to be peccable to be the right sacrifice or to what extent Christ was human and temptable/peccable. Theologians are still divided today. I agree with John E. McKinley that it is difficult to cover the breadth of theology on this topic thoroughly.[186] However, various basic models of impeccability may well represent broadly the direction taken by various theologians throughout history. It also makes sense to highlight that the topic of Christ's impeccability has not been, especially among earliest Christian thinkers, as patristic theologians, at the centre of thorough and systematic work.[187]

Often, the case has been that of including the question of impeccability within the discussions of other theological points or in conversations with biblical interpretations. Nevertheless, the attempt to clarify impeccability has had common elements in history, and similar conclusions have been reached on crucial factors such as Christ's sinlessness, temptation, and divine impeccability. However, disagreement has been shown on how these and other key elements relate to each other

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[185] The difficulty of this is highlighted by the words of the German philosopher Feuerbach who wrote in the 19th century that the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation was a historical impossibility because for the deity to be within one person would be an "absolute miracle, a violent suspension of all the laws and principles of reality." For Feuerbach, Incarnation and history are incompatible, and if the deity enters into history, history should cease to exist. But, who would be comfortable taking a step further and believing that the Son of God, entering history, time and space, could be trapped in it and die forever? Ludwig Feuerbach, "Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Philosophie," in *Sämmtliche Werke,* vol.2, *Philosophische und Grundsätze* (Leipzing: Otto Wigand, 1846) 188-189; trans.: "Toward a Critique of Hegelian Philosophy," in *The Young Hegelians* (ed. L. S. Stepelevich; New York, NY: Humanity Books, 1983) 97.

[186] See John E. McKinley, "Four Patristic Models of Jesus Christ's Impeccability and Temptation," *Perichoresis* 9.1 (2011): 29-67, "Based on what I have examined, it does not seem that extending the study in depth and breadth further would yield more models than what I have reported here," esp. 30.

[187] Among the early theologians that claimed the impeccability of Christ, one may remember, as an example, the contributions of Tertullian, Origen, Augustine, Clement of Alexandria, Athanasius, Basil of Caesarea, Irenaeus of Lyons, Apollinaris of Laodicea, John of Damascus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Leontius of Jerusalem. For a full discussion on differences and similarities in the impeccability view of these mentioned authors, and for a valuable and extended bibliographical reference, see McKinley, "Four Patristic Models of Jesus Christ's Impeccability and Temptation."

within the broad theological picture. The different ways of explaining Christ's impeccability focused on understanding the interaction of divinity with humanity in the Incarnation. Nowadays, what has reached a major *consensus* in the history of Christianity, namely the belief that Christ could not sin, as advanced by many patristic and later thinkers, has not found relevant argumentative expansions in later and current times. The modern arguments in favour of the impeccability view have been shaped significantly by previous concepts, as outlined briefly in the following paragraphs.

An overview can show how, for example, one of the points of reference in the discussion is the idea that Christ's impeccability should find its justification in his divine impeccable nature ('inherent impeccability'). In other words, he could not sin, or he was unable to sin because he was God. In this case, the problem rests on the fact that this approach is theologically inadequate to explain how Christ could live an experience entirely identical to that of human beings. Sinlessness may improperly be considered an achievement as this view of impeccability does not include any potential risk for Christ or any other outcome. Christ would have experienced a human nature somehow different from that of any other human. In this sense, this idea fails to highlight how Christ could be victorious over sin and temptation. It would also be difficult to explain the sense of the biblical affirmation that Christ learned obedience through the things he suffered, as in Hebrew 5:8. Certainly, Christian theology, over the centuries, contended that sinfulness never became a part of human nature. However, I concur that it is challenging to accurately portray or define Christ's humanity given the Incarnation model adopted, for example, throughout the patristic period.

Another proposal in favour of the impeccability of Christ is the idea that his humanity was in a sense divinised. This is also problematic because it portrays a Christ able to resist sin through an enhanced human nature. This would result in a sort of advantageous condition, precluding the struggle of humanity in the face of temptation. Deification is a concept closer to glorification than to sanctification (or the battle against temptation). Therefore, it does not seem to adequately clarify how the immutable and impeccable divine nature of Christ could meet his human nature in the Incarnation. The continuous formulation of other hypotheses is the demonstration that the impeccability view has not found full agreement so far. Numerous questions remain still open.

A further step in the discussion is taken by moving away from the attributes of the divine and human natures of the Son of God incarnate to his person. This argument focuses on what may be called a divine hypostatic dominance over the human will. The human will is perfectly anchored in God's will, and this divine hegemonic reality should make it possible for Christ to triumph over sin

as a man. However, this calls into discussion questions of double nature and double will in the single person of the Son of God incarnate, and much more that of how he could genuinely suffer temptations as an act of obedience instead of conformity to God's will. Christ would not be able to empathically help humanity as his human will would only give assent to God's will, and God's will would be a dominating ruler and not a struggle against sin. The human will is here belittled and, once more, Christ could not perfectly play the role of an example for other human beings.

A valid attempt to address various theological inadequacies has been made by relying on God's grace as the power to help Christ overcome sin. This theological argument tries to maintain the idea that Christ could be sinless but in a way that could also be an example for others. Through the intervention of the Holy Spirit, this empowering grace made it possible for Christ to live a sinless life in his humanity. Divine grace would play a prominent role in combination with a consenting human will in facing temptation. In a sense, on the one hand, divine grace would preserve divine impeccability, and on the other, it would allow human moral achievements. In other words, grace preserves the integrity of the natures so that Christ can face temptation and resist sin in a way that all can follow; he can, therefore, sympathize with humanity. In this sense, the focus is shifted and impeccability is not communicated by God but is the result of the work of divine grace, which enables Christ to obey God. Divine grace is here a help given by the Holy Spirit. This concept would somehow mirror God's work of salvation, where the Holy Spirit plays a role in perfecting the life of the believers. All of this would anyway require thinking at the question of temptability because if the integrity of both natures is preserved, then humanity is indeed temptable. Therefore, Christ should struggle to resist sin, and victory constitutes a moral human achievement made possible not by divine impeccability but by divine grace. However, this does not thoroughly clarify the role of the union of the two natures, nor does it answer the consequent question of what would happen if temptable humanity failed and sinned.

This proposal brings the Son of God incarnate closer to humanity. This is not without problems for those who believe that impeccability must be intended as the inability of Christ to commit sin, instead of the choice of not sinning. The latter, in fact, is an argument that has found fertile ground within the concept of divine grace as the power to help Christ not to sin, though not by all theologians supporting the empowering grace view. It may sound to some a very problematic concept that of Christ enduring temptations in his humanity without the intervention of his divine

nature. However, this may be seen as securing Christ's truest empathy with human beings and satisfying questions about his human freedom despite the union with the divine nature.

In this way, Christ could have offered an example to follow and the means for it, though not through inherent divinity but through a grace that is operative in a similar way in the rest of humanity. The role of the Holy Spirit, providing grace to Christ's humanity, is highly relevant, especially in light of how analogously this reality may be true in the life of the believers. This is particularly true, not without risks, where pneumatological aspects of this mysterious question have been highlighted. These ideas, though trying to maintain the orthodox essential likeness of Christ to both humanity and divinity, have not become too popular within theologically traditional contexts and are suspiciously seen as proposing too much emphasis on Christ's humanity over divinity to the point of supporting divisive Christology. Nevertheless, this paved the way for medieval and then later Reformation theologians such as John Calvin (1509-1564).

Since Calvin's theology is part of the context of dialogue in which to insert White's Christology, I see it important to outline his views on im/peccability here briefly. Calvin believed that Christ inherited a morally fallen human nature, but the Holy Spirit cleansed his sinful nature before or during conception.[188] He considered humanity as a sort of veil covering divinity.[189] In this sense, *kenosis* is not the abdication of divinity but its concealment. If, on the one hand, Calvin believed that hypothetically Christ could commit sin though only by voluntarily eclipsing his divinity,[190] on the other, his concept of concealment offers the ground to believe that divinity was in 'full power' in Christ's human existence and, therefore, he was unable to sin. In fact, while commenting on Philippians 2:7,[191] Calvin writes, "Christ, indeed, could not renounce His divinity, but He kept it concealed for a time, that under the weakness of the flesh it might not be seen. Hence He laid aside

[188] See Michael J. McClymond, Gerald R. McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Oxford-New York: OUP, 2012), 258.

[189] Ellen G. White writes extensively about the idea that Christ veiled divinity with humanity. Various statements are presented throughout this chapter and the following ones.

[190] Edward D. Willis, *Calvin's Catholic Christology: The Function of the So-Called Extra Calvinisticum in Calvin's Christology* (Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought 2; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966), 80. "This full humanity was enabled by the Eternal Son's emptying himself in the sense of freely concealing himself and withholding the exercise of his powers through the flesh to which he was fully joined. The kenosis was the concealment, not the abdication, of the Eternal Son's divine majesty."

[191] "…but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form…"

His glory in the view of men, not by lessening, but by concealing it."[192] Calvin supports the idea that the divine nature of the Son of God incarnate maintained its full *status* but in a condition of 'concealment'. This concept will resonate with White's model of the Incarnation.[193] Calvin continues his discussion on the same Bible verse in the *Institutes,* where he explains again *kenosis* as the veiling of Christ's divinity within flesh "*carnis velamine suam divinitatem adscondi passus est*."[194]

Calvin highlights the role of the Holy Spirit to preserve and protect the human nature of Christ against temptations, as his humanity was temptable and weak. He thinks the divinity had to be restrained somehow to permit Christ to suffer. This 'suppressed' divine nature should not have exerted any force over the temptable humanity so Christ could live the experience of temptation within the fullness of human vulnerability. Divinity is, therefore, veiled and placed in the 'background' so that humanity can be authentically experienced both outwardly and inwardly.

By saying that Christ suffered *tentationem ex doloris et metus*,[195] Calvin emphasises that his human nature did prove suffering and pain. However, it is unclear if Calvin sees suffering as a necessity of the sacrifice or if he considers it a sign of his possibility to sin. His view highlights the integrity of Christ's human nature to the point that divine nature does not have any transforming effects on it. He keeps the two natures distinct, however, not in order to protect divinity from a sort of abasement but humanity from any interference from divinity. This logic is at the basis of Calvin's view that Christ could experience temptation in a way common to human beings.[196] Only by keeping humanity and divinity separated can humanity meet its reality. This can be true if humanity is not 'protected' by divinity, nor 'influenced'.

Therefore, Calvin considers it relevant to understand that Christ could not be a 'Victor' if he had not felt in body and soul the severity of temptation. He attempts to preserve the vulnerability of human nature while affirming the fullness of Christ's divinity by teaching that the divine Logos was not limited by the flesh (*Logos extra carnem*). This is made possible through the help of the Holy

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[192] Calvin, *Commentarius in Epistolam ad Philippenses*, 2.7 (*Ioannis Calvini Opera quae supersunt omnia* [abbreviated, CO] 30 [1895]: 26; ed. W. Baum, E. Cunitz, and E. Reuss; Halle: C. A. Schwetschke & Sons, 1834-1900; reprint, New York: Johnston Reprint, 1964); English trans. *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians, Calvin's Commentaries* (trans. T. H. L. Parker; vol. 11; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), 248.

[193] See 3.1.1 "A Veiled Divinity (*katapetasma* Incarnational Model): Only humanity could reach humanity."

[194] Calvin, *Institutiones* II.XIII.2 (*Johannis Calvini Opera Selecta*, 3:450, 20-451, 1; ed. P. Barth and W. Niesel Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1926-62).

[195] Willis, *Calvin's Catholic Christology,* 79.

[196] See Stephen Edmondson, *Calvin's Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 119-120.

Spirit. The Reformer means that Christ received grace and power to resist sin. Christ has the same weakness as every human being, but the power of the Spirit defended him. In this sense, Calvin's view ultimately falls into the impeccability standpoint, as the Holy Spirit becomes the guarantor of Christ's sinlessness. The empowering grace given to Christ would make it possible for him 'not to be able to sin', as Calvin says that the Holy Spirit defended Christ so that "Satan's darts could not penetrate" (*Satanae telis penetrabilis non esset*).[197] In this sense, Calvin's idea of a veiled divinity by humanity (different from White's, as it will be shown) implies the integrity of human nature, temptable and weak as unmitigated by his divinity, but made impeccable by the aid of the Holy Spirit.[198]

In conclusion, the doctrine of impeccability, therefore, states that Christ was unable to sin. This *non posse peccare* view dominated, for centuries until today, the debates about the sinless *status* of Christ. With various degrees of agreement, theologians have tried to reconcile (with different proposals) the question of the real temptation of Christ with that of his being unable to be overcome by it.[199] Efforts have been made to affirm and defend, throughout the history of Christianity, the impeccability of Christ.[200] The majority of theologians have promoted the idea that Christ was

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[197] Calvin, *Harmonia Evangelica*, CO 45:131 *Commentarius in Harmoniam Evangelicam* 45:131 (*Joannis Calvini opera quae supersunt Omnia*, CO 45, eds. Edouard Cunitz, Johann-Wilhelm Baum, Eduard Wilhelm Eugen Reuss; Brunsvigae: C.A. Schwetschke, 1863, 59 tomes en 58 vol.; scanned copy of the original text available at: archive-ouverte.unige.ch/unige:650 [retrieved Dec. 2021]); English trans. *The Harmony of the Four Evangelists* (trans. Richard J. Dinda; Malone, TX: Center for the Study of Lutheran Orthodoxy, 2009), commentary on Mat. 4:1; personal translation.

[198] For further study on the role of the Holy Spirit in Christology see Gerald F. Hawthorne, *The Presence and the Power: The Significance of the Holy Spirit in the Life of Jesus* (Dallas, TX: Word, 1991); Ralph Del Colle, *Christ and the Spirit: Spirit-Christology in Trinitarian Perspective* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994); Graham W. P. McFarlane, *Christ and the Spirit: The Doctrine of the Incarnation According to Edward Irving* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996).

[199] See also Maurice Wiles, *The Making of Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967); Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus. God and Man*, (2nd edition; trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe; Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1977); Donald Fairbairn, "Grace and Christology in the Early Church," in O*xford Early Christian Studies* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[200] See Vincent Brümmer, "Divine Impeccability," *Religious Studies* 20 (1984): 203-214; William R. Carter, "Impeccability Revisited," *Analysis* 44 (1985): 52-55; Antonie Vos, "The Possibility of Impeccability," in *Christian Faith and Philosophical Theology: Essays in Honor of Vincent Brummer* (eds. Gijsbert van den Brink, Luco J. van den Brom, and Marcel Sarot; Kampen, NL: Kok Pharos, 1992), 227-239; Michael McGhee Canham, "*Potuit non peccare* or *non potuit peccare:* Evangelicals, Hermeneutics, and the Impeccability Debate," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 11 (2000): 93-114; Simon F. Gaine, *'Will There Be Free Will in Heaven? ': Freedom, Impeccability and Beatitude* (London: T&T Clark, 2003); John McKinley, *Tempted For Us: Theological Models and the Practical Relevance of Christ's Impeccability and Temptation* (Colorado Springs, CO: Paternoster, 2009); Bruce Ware, "The Man Christ Jesus," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 53, no. 1 (2010): 5-18.

unable to sin. However, some denied impeccability.[201] White's idea of infinite risk is undoubtedly grounded in the belief in Christ's peccability. Therefore, it becomes necessary to examine the question of im/peccability, and its Christological and Trinitarian implications in White's Christology and how she develops her views starting from the common Calvinistic concept of the Incarnation as 'clothed divinity.' However, before moving to a close analysis of these core theological issues within the framework of this investigation – the infinite risk – it is helpful to focus briefly on another foundational element, the interaction between divine and human nature.

In fact, Christianity can indeed recount numerous Christological debates on this specific topic. Centuries of theological discussions agreed to a certain degree that Christ is fully divine and fully human; however, the interaction of natures remains a difficult Christological point to explain. In this framework, the following section intends to briefly evaluate some of the issues that cluster around the concept of infinite risk in light of the potential theological challenges raised by the divine-human interplay. White's ideas on the Incarnation, God, the relation among the divine persons, and the possibility for Christ to commit sin and be divided from God will still be part of the conversation in the following chapters.

2.2.2 The Interaction between Divine and Human Nature

The long-standing debates surrounding the Incarnation involve the interaction between the divine and human natures. These debates raise questions about how the essential attributes of divinity, such as omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence, were maintained in the human Christ. Additionally, other questions address the need to comprehend the coexistence, mutual influence, necessity, and respective roles of the two natures within the purpose of the Incarnation.

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[201] See 3.1.5 "Infinite Risk and Peccability," for example, for a discussion on the positions of the American Presbyterian theologian Charles Hodge (1797-1878), a contemporary of White. He writes in his *Systematic Theology* that the sinlessness of Christ does not imply absolute impeccability, not a *non potest peccare* state. Furthermore, he clearly states that if Christ truly embodied humanity, he must have retained the capacity to sin. Because temptation, by its very nature, presupposes the potentiality of sin, Hodge believes that if Christ's constitution rendered sin impossible, then the temptation becomes illusory and ineffectual. This would challenge the notion of his empathetic connection with humanity and his ability to resist sin as an example for Christians. See Hodge, Charles, *Systematic Theology* (in three volumes; various editions, edition consulted Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013) vol.2, 457. See also, on Hodge's view on Christ's impeccability, James J. Cassidy, "No 'Absolute Impeccability:' Charles Hodge and Christology at Old and New Princeton," *The Confessional Presbyterian* (Volume 9, 2013).

It seems that White's perspective could suggest that Christ's experience of human limitations involves a subsiding of divine consciousness. However, more than divine knowledge confined in a pre-conscious state, White would think of a *kenoticism* where divinity is 'veiled' in human flesh. However, divine properties and consciousness are not concealed, while humanity remains open to all its weaknesses and possible consequences of sin.[202] White would write that "Jesus Christ laid off His royal robe, His kingly crown, and clothed His divinity with humanity, in order to become a substitute and surety for humanity, that dying in humanity He might by His death destroy him who had the power of death."[203] She thinks of a divine Christ clothed in human garb dying 'in' humanity. How the divine can die is by surrendering his divine nature to the human state; clothing divinity with humanity. This is a voluntary acquiescence: Christ accepts to join the divine nature indissolubly to the human.

For Christ to make an infinite sacrifice, White writes that he "could not have done this as God, but by coming as man, Christ could die. By death He overcame death. The death of Christ bore to the death him who had the power of death, and opened the gates of the tomb for all who receive Him as their personal Saviour."[204] Christ could die because he came as a human being. It is by joining divinity with humanity that death on the cross was possible. While many would agree with White on the purposes and means of salvation outlined in this statement, mainstream Christianity would not hold her views on what divinity could go through in a risk scenario. In fact, in the following statement, White captures much of her understanding of what happened at the cross,

> Upon Christ as our substitute and surety was laid the iniquity of us all. He was counted a transgressor, that He might redeem us from the condemnation of the law. The guilt of every descendant of Adam was pressing upon His heart. The wrath of God against sin, the terrible manifestation of His displeasure because of iniquity, filled the soul of His Son with consternation. All His life Christ had been publishing to a fallen world the good news of the Father's mercy and pardoning love. Salvation for the chief of sinners was His theme. But now with the terrible weight of guilt He bears, He cannot see the Father's reconciling face. The withdrawal of the divine countenance from the Saviour in this

[202] For further study on this point see "3.1.1 A Veiled Divinity (*katapetasma* Incarnational Model): Only Humanity could reach Humanity."

[203] Lt 97, 18 November 1898, para.5 (to 'My Brethren in North Fitzroy'). A letter sent to the brethren of the local Adventist community in the area of Melbourne-Australia.

[204] Ibid.

> hour of supreme anguish pierced His heart with a sorrow that can never be fully understood by man. So great was this agony that His physical pain was hardly felt. Satan with his fierce temptations wrung the heart of Jesus. The Saviour could not see through the portals of the tomb. Hope did not present to Him His coming forth from the grave a conqueror, or tell Him of the Father's acceptance of the sacrifice. He feared that sin was so offensive to God that their separation was to be eternal. Christ felt the anguish which the sinner will feel when mercy shall no longer plead for the guilty race. It was the sense of sin, bringing the Father's wrath upon Him as man's substitute, that made the cup He drank so bitter, and broke the heart of the Son of God.[205]

Several elements of this statement would not find support within mainstream Trinitarian theology or Chalcedonian and Nicene creeds. While many would agree in a sort of understanding that the guilt of every human being would fall upon Christ, thus resulting in God's wrath, what White believes in this regard falls beyond general agreement. In fact, while she describes Christ's anguish as the result of the sense of guilt of "every descendant of Adam", "God's wrath against sin", and his "terrible manifestation" of displeasure, she also claims that Christ could not "see the Father's reconciling face." Most of all, this above-physical pain was the result of Christ's inability to see beyond the tomb and find hope in the resurrection. Christ feared that the separation from the Father "was to be eternal." To an implied question, "Of which death did Christ die?" White would answer by describing Christ's anguish as that of the unforgiven and condemned sinner.

In other words, and as it will become clearer by further analysis in the following chapters, White believed that Christ could have sinned and that if he had sinned, he would not have been resurrected, and this would have also been the end of his divinity. Thus, Christ's death was possible for the human nature if Christ kept his sinless state, but also for the divine nature if Christ had sinned. As a God, Christ could not die because he was not subjected to death in his divine pre-existing and eternal nature. Once he became man, and in order to save the fallen human race, however, he took the risk of becoming subject to death even as God. To be capable of dying or subjected to eternal death, he needed to assume the human mortal nature, thus subjecting his divine existence to his human one.

[205] DA, 753.

In White's Christology, the divinity of Christ is placed 'under' the clothes of humanity with all its deficiencies. This reveals a divinity that is at the service of humanity but also shares its experiences and, most of all, its sufferings and weaknesses. This is why White explicitly says that "men need to understand that the Deity suffered under the agonies of Calvary."[206] Christ truly suffered as a divine being within human nature. In this perspective, the purity and perfection of his divine nature intensified the weight of his suffering and the depth of his empathetic connection with humanity.[207] White writes of Christ's agony as that of the pre-existing divine Son of God.[208] Thus, his divine nature is inseparable from his divine person, and so is his human nature after the Incarnation. They form an integral part of Christ's personhood. No distinction between nature and person is made evident in this argument, nor does White seem to see a true distinction. Christ's divine nature is intrinsically part of his person, and the Incarnation joined humanity with it in an indissoluble way. Therefore, when White talks of the 'Deity' as suffering, she talks of Christ's very divine person without excluding the whole Godhead from the picture.[209]

Obviously, one could argue about what it means that Christ's divine nature is 'part' of his person or that the suffering Deity, in White's view, refers to 'Christ's divine person without excluding the whole Godhead'. Traditional Christology would hold that Christ suffered in his humanity, but due to the communication of idioms, this can also be said of the 'person' but not of the divine 'nature'. What is then White's view? Does she think that in Christ, 'divine nature' itself suffered? I suggest

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[206] "After the camp meeting," RH 4 April 1899.

[207] "The issues at stake were beyond the comprehension of men, and the temptations that assailed Christ were as much more intense and subtle than those which assail man as His character was purer and more exalted than is the character of man in his moral and physical defilement. In His conflict with the prince of darkness in this atom of a world, Christ had to meet the whole confederacy of evil, the united forces of the adversary of God and man; but at every point He met the tempter, and put him to flight. Christ was conqueror over the powers of darkness, and took the infinite risk of consenting to war with the enemy, that He might conquer him in our behalf," in "The Mighty and Inspiring Conflict," ST 5 January 1915, para. 4.

[208] Without entering here into specific questions linked to the concept of an impassible God who cannot suffer, it is necessary anyway to point out that a God incapable to suffer is foreign to the theological frame of White's hermeneutics. The contemporary understanding of God in relation to suffering has been profoundly impacted by the immense suffering of this world, and today there is a growing acceptance of the solidary presence of God in suffering. However, White's understanding of this is not shaped by what she sees around herself in the late 1800s' in United States, but by her personal biblical hermeneutics. Weinandy's comprehensive study about the possibility for God to participate in suffering is just one of the examples of the long debated question: Does God suffer? White would answer in an affirmative form, against any idea that a God who is impassible is more loving and compassionate than a God who suffers. White would surely argue that in the Son of God, Deity experienced suffering. See Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000).

[209] See, for example, Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Change? The Word's Becoming in the Incarnation* (Still River, MA: St. Bede's Publications, 1985).

that White's perspective is that the divinity of Christ is not separate or detached from his human nature, but rather, it is encompassed within it. According to this viewpoint, Christ's divinity is described as being 'under' or enclosed in his humanity, including all its limitations and deficiencies. This means that the divine nature of Christ is not distant or aloof from human experiences; instead, it actively participates and shares in the full range of human experiences, including suffering, weaknesses, and limitations. White explicitly emphasizes the need for people to understand that the Deity, referring firstly to the divine nature of Christ, and by extension to the whole Godhead, suffered during the agonies of Calvary. This highlights the notion that Christ's suffering was not merely the experience of a human being, but also the suffering of a divine being within the context of his human nature.

Nevertheless, there should always be a clear recognition that not all mystery may be dispelled, nor an exhaustive description of Christ may be provided. Even more, in the case of White's theology, she has not written to answer all questions raised by Christological debates over the centuries that preceded her. Even if White does not write a systematic theology, her insights may offer grounds for comparing Christological assumptions. However, her statements must be interpreted in their context, which is usually practical. Her Christology and biblical hermeneutics are consistently at the service of Christian life, and she writes with the pastoral purpose of supporting the church.

In conclusion, scholars of past and more recent times have made substantial contributions to the inquiry into Christ's Incarnation, developing models to enhance the understanding of this theological concept.[210] I am indebted to many Biblical scholars and theologians who have delved into this challenging topic. Nevertheless, it seems logically impossible to answer all possible questions raised by the event of the Incarnation, nor is it here feasible to approach and explain every single variation of all available Christologies and Christological models of the Incarnation. [211]

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[210] There are a number of strategies for Christology constituted by over-arching models offering a general, though systematic, structure to the argument. A Christological model of the Incarnation should be able to accommodate and unite, organically, both ideas on the person and on the redemptive work of Christ. All of this should be done by attending to the Scriptural evidence and proposing models with significant explanatory strength and expansive in their scope. Theologians throughout Christian history have kept invoking some or all of these models, often extensively overlapping or mutually inclusive, to a greater or lesser degree. Sometimes it has been done in a climate of competition or in an apologetic frame.

[211] In recent time, Loke, for example, in his book *A Kryptic Model of the Incarnation,* tries to harmonize the long-standing debate about how to reconcile the limitations of the human nature of Christ with the unlimited power of the divine one. He proposes that Christ's 'supernatural' properties were concealed during the Incarnation. Loke discusses three main potential answers in his book: the ontological *kenotic* model, the two consciousnesses model supported by several

Impossible is even the task to critically reflect on the various attempts to answer the numerous Christological challenges. Moreover, scepticism is an element of many Christological arguments around the Incarnation to the point of questioning the occurrence of the Incarnation in history. I rather intend to offer in the following chapters an integrated overview of the contribution of White to the question of how Christ could be divine and human at the same time and in the same person and how this interaction between natures may frame the question of Christ's infinite risk. This will be done, starting from the next chapter, by analysing White's Incarnational model and attempting to answer questions on Christ's peccability, temptability, and mutability from her perspective and in light of the theological implications posed by White's theology of infinite risk.

theologians and philosophers, and William Sanday's divine subconscious model. Loke's model of the Incarnation somewhat objects to these three models and somewhat resemblances them. Certainly, White uses a theological language distant from modern argumentative approaches to the topic. While Loke, as many others, may delve into terminology nowadays proper of Christological debates, such as unconsciousness, pre-consciousness, *kenoticism* (functional or ontological), 'two minds', and even Logos, all of this is completely absent in White's writings. One of the models presented by Loke somehow finds a degree, though with some limits, of contact with White's comprehension of a "veiled" divinity, as I will discuss in due course. Loke believes that, to a certain extent, the 'powers' of Christ continued to exist, even if not used, in the act of emptying himself of his divinity. Borrowing from seventeenth-century Lutheran debates, he uses the term 'kryptic' to talk about Christ concealing his divine qualities while keeping a status equal to the Father. His kryptic model postulates that Christ had a single consciousness yet retained his divine power at the Incarnation. The divine powers were 'hidden' and used only in selected occasions where divine glory had a reason to be shown. Loke's key proposal is that Christ could refrain from using his divine attributes and consequently experience human weakness. He argues that Christ's divine awareness remains in his preconscious without the need for constant conscious awareness. In other words, Loke thinks that as a divine person, Christ could use his divinity to restrict the scope of his divine conscious awareness. In a way, Christ chose to let his divine knowledge reside in his divine preconscious, and consequently, he could consciously experience the limitation of humanity. See Andrew Ter Ern Loke, *A Kryptic Model of the Incarnation* (London: Routledge, 2014).

Chapter 3

"Infinite Risk": A Contextual Hermeneutics

3.1 White's Im/peccable and Im/mutable Christ?

Although the kenotic theology of the eighteenth, and especially nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw Christ as abandoning most, if not all, of his divine qualities, Christian tradition has generally claimed that Jesus could not sin and that in the Incarnation, at least, he did not surrender what is proper of his divine nature: impeccability. Kenotic discussions have often resolved in debates where the concept of Christ's impossibility to sin prevailed. Already a century before White, Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) "told his parishioners that Moses' burning bush was never consumed as a demonstration that Christ's human nature could never perish because of the divinity in it" and that Christ had a sinless nature without wrongful impulses.[212]

However, the claim that Christ could not sin appears at first as a contradiction because in order to be genuinely tempted, one must be able to sin. If Christ could not sin, he could not be tempted like anyone else. This question has found a place in many debates throughout the centuries, though today, it is not a core element in the current Trinitarian and Christological discussion. Most theologians appear to believe in the impeccability of Christ. Therefore, opposite opinions are dismissed or considered somewhat 'heretical.' Undoubtedly, the question of the Incarnation is at the centre of the problem, especially how the human and divine nature interacted with each other in the incarnated Son of God.

Whilst encouraging to fix the eyes on what she calls "the most marvelous thing that ever took place in earth or heaven – the incarnation of the Son of God,"[213] White writes that the Saviour

> clothed his divinity with humanity. He employed the human faculties, for only by adopting these could He be comprehended by humanity. Only humanity could reach humanity. He lived out the character of God through the human body which God had prepared for Him. He blessed the world by living out in human flesh the life of God, thus showing that he had the power to unite humanity to divinity.[214]

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[212] McClymond, and McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards,* 258.

[213] "The Burning of the Sanitarium," Ms 76, 20 February 1903, para. 18.

[214] "Even so send I you," RH 15 June 1895, para. 3.

It is precisely in the mystery of a clothed divinity that White sees the relevance of adopting the human faculties to comprehend and be comprehended by humanity. The human body is the means through which the divine character is revealed, and Christ lived the life of God in human flesh, uniting humanity to divinity. Therefore, I intend to address, in the following four sub-sections, (1) what White intends with her approach to the Incarnation with the expression "clothed divinity", (2) how this relates to the Trinitarian attribute of immutability, and (3) how this approach has relevant Trinitarian and Christological implications strictly dependent on (4) the claim of a temptable and peccable Christ. The concluding summary sections will then recapitulate and prepare for a closer look at White's concept of infinite risk within her extensive writings.

3.1.1 A Veiled Divinity (*katapetasma* Incarnational Model): Only humanity could reach humanity

One of the modes of engagement with the question of how divinity and humanity could 'meet' is to offer models for how that could have happened. This usually involves retrieving models from the past. Old conceptions reached in early Christianity, or developed throughout the centuries, are today revisited. The question of the Incarnation would require a plethora of bibliographical references, and many have advanced various Christological models, whose complete list of variants would not only be impossible but would be more an encyclopaedic work than research and would move away from the specificity of White's Christology.[215] Furthermore, often, these studies are conducted disjointedly from what Christ did (Soteriology). Questions about his life may not be meaningfully investigated away from those about his death, nor those about who Christ is from those about what he does. Christ's redemptive work and his nature are inseparable, especially in White's discussion of the infinite risk.

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[215] Some relevant recent studies include: Douglas K. Blount, "On the Incarnation of a Timeless God," in *God and Time: Essays on the Divine Nature* (eds. G. E. Ganssle, and D. M. Woodruff; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 236–248; Sarah Coakley, "What Does Chalcedon Solve and What Does It Not? Some Reflections on the Status and Meaning of the Chalcedonian 'Definition'," in *The Incarnation* (ed. S. T. Davis, D. Kendall, and G. O'Collins; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 143–163; Vincent Brümmer, *Atonement, Christology and the Trinity: Making Sense of Christian Doctrine* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); Marilyn McCord Adams, *Christ and Horrors: The Coherence of Christology* (Cambridge, UK - New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006); James M. Arcadi, "Kryptic or Cryptic? The Divine Preconscious Model of the Incarnation as a Concrete-Nature Christology," *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematicsche Theologie Und Religionsphilosophie* 58, no. 2 (2016): 229–243.

To unravel White's perspective on the Incarnation, a well-known poem of her Methodist tradition may offer clear ground.[216] Written by Charles Wesley (1707-1788) in 1739 and included as "Hymn for Christmas-day" in John Wesley's collection *Hymn and Sacred Poems,*[217] the poem recites in one of the stanzas: "CHRIST, by highest Heav'n ador'd, CHRIST, the Everlasting Lord, Late in Time behold him come, Offspring of a Virgin's Womb. Veil'd in Flesh, the Godhead see, Hail th' Incarnate Deity! Pleas'd as Man with Men t' appear JESUS, our Immanuel here."[218]

White, like Wesley and Calvin before her, uses the language of clothed divinity to talk of the Incarnation. This defines her Incarnation model. White's use of the term 'veil' seems to develop a specific concept of Christology in which Christ's human nature constitutes a covering to his divinity. However, his divine properties are not concealed. She writes that Christ "veiled his divinity with the garb of humanity, but he did not part with His divinity"[219] and that he "had not exchanged His divinity for humanity; but He had clothed His divinity in humanity."[220] Thus, Christ is *Forma Dei* in *Humana Corporis Forma*, or as White would put it while commenting on a most emblematic biblical text regarding the nature and the Incarnation of Christ, Philippians 2:6,[221] "His glory was shrouded, his divinity veiled with humanity, the invisible glory in the visible human form."[222] This 'veil'-Incarnational model may also rely on her typological reading of the earthly tabernacle. In fact, White believes that, like the sins of Israel were transferred to the temple through the blood and implicitly placed on its dividing 'veil', the sins are now placed upon Christ.[223] This may echo the words of Hebrews 10:20[224] where, similarly in the context of Tabernacle imagery, the 'veil' seems to typify Christ's flesh or Incarnation. Thus, the lexeme 'veil' (gr. Καταπέτασμα; *katapétasma*) may well serve here to define White's Incarnational model as she uses the terminology of Christ 'veiling' his divinity

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[216] See in 1.2 "Who is Ellen White" for a comprehensive footnote on the historical, theological, and social dimensions of Methodist tradition.

[217] John R. Watson, *The English Hymn: A Critical and Historical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 205-229.

[218] John and Charles Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (London: William Strahan, 1739), full text available at https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/ecco/004800840.0001.000/1:5.65?rgn=div2;view=fulltext (retrieved August 2023).

[219] "Lessons From the Second Chapter of Philippians," RH 15 June 1905, para. 12.

[220] "Satan's Malignity Against Christ and His People," RH 29 October 1895, para. 6.

[221] "who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited."

[222] DA, 23.

[223] "[…] the sins of the people were by faith placed upon the sin offering and through its blood transferred, in figure, to the earthly sanctuary, so in the new covenant the sins of the repentant are by faith placed upon Christ and transferred, in fact, to the heavenly sanctuary," GW88, 421.

[224] "by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh)."

with humanity, or similar ones, hundreds of time in her writings.[225] Therefore, more than a kenotic view of Christ, White realises what I define as a *katapétasma* model of Christology where God is 'veiled' in human flesh. This suggests a divine nature positioned 'behind' the human one and thus seemingly allowing humanity to take the forefront and control. In this line of thought, even if Christ possessed divine excellence and greatness, he "came from heaven to earth, clothed his divinity with humanity, and bore the curse as surety for the fallen race. He was not compelled to do this; but he chose to bear the results of man's transgression that man might escape eternal death." [226] The Incarnation is for White, a free choice of the Son of God who decided to leave the throne in heaven so that man could escape eternal death. Clothing divinity with humanity resulted in Christ bearing the curse of the fallen race and the results of man's transgression, as White would say, to the point of risking his eternal life. [227]

It is relevant to note that White's concept of the person of Christ is not the result of an over-extended process. Early in the 1800s, White already had a clear understanding of the divine nature of the Son of God. Her view became even more detailed in the late 1800s and the beginning of the 1900s. When she refers to Christ in her writings, she constantly addresses the Son of God, whether only as a divine being when in reference to his life in heaven before the Incarnation, or as both divine and human after the Incarnation and even after the resurrection. As early as 1866, it appears clear that she holds the view that Christ, as a divine being, stands on the same level as the Father. She writes that "[w]hen they [Israel] came to Sinai, He took occasion to refresh their minds in regard to His requirements. Christ and the Father, standing side by side upon the mount, with solemn majesty proclaimed the Ten Commandments."[228]

For White, the purpose of 'disguising' divinity with humanity is at the centre of the soteriological event because,

[i]t was necessary that humanity and divinity should be united. Divinity needed humanity, that

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[225] See also Webster, *Crosscurrents in Adventist Christology,* ch. 2, sub-section "The Incarnation and Nature".

[226] "The Plan of Salvation," ST 20 February 1893, para. 4.

[227] The existence of Christ, his nature and ministry are subjects of difficult discussion. Many have discussed the question of the so-called 'hypostatic' union of the two natures. See Michael Cook, *The Jesus of Faith: A Study in Christology* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1981); Scott Cowdell, *Is Jesus Unique? A Study of Recent Christology* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1996); Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ* (Robert T. Walker, ed.; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008); David Brown, *Divine Humanity: Kenosis Explored and Defended* (London: SCM Press, 2010); Ian A. McFarland, *The Word Made Flesh: A Theology of the Incarnation* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2019).

[228] "Labors In The Piedmont Valleys," HS, 231.

> humanity might afford a channel of communication between God and man, and humanity needed divinity, that a power from above might restore man to the likeness of God. Christ was God, but he did not appear as God. He veiled the tokens of divinity, which had commanded the homage of angels and called forth the adoration of the universe of God. He made himself of no reputation, took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of sinful flesh. For our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich."[229]

The purpose of the Incarnation was to reach humanity. In the words of White, humanity and divinity should have been united for this purpose. She writes that "divinity needed humanity", which appears to be a mandatory necessity to re-establish a communication channel between God and man. At the same time, "humanity needed divinity" so that man could be restored to the likeness of God by receiving power from above. This is why Christ veiled his divinity and took upon him the human form in the "likeness of sinful flesh." However, what this entails remains a challenge for White.[230] She recognizes that "[w]e cannot explain the great mystery of the plan of redemption. Jesus took upon himself humanity, that he might reach humanity; but we cannot explain how divinity was clothed with humanity."[231] This is why White warns of the risk of dimming a clear perception of how humanity combined with divinity and how Christ's birth should be accepted as a miracle.[232] She holds the view that "there is no one who can explain the mystery of the incarnation of Christ."[233] As she writes extensively in an article that appeared in 1896, in the magazine *Signs of the Times,* in the contemplation of the Incarnation of Christ "in humanity, we stand baffled before an unfathomable mystery, that the human mind cannot comprehend. The more we reflect upon it, the more amazing does it appear."[234] Therefore, the study of the Incarnation remains a rich and

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[229] "The Plan of Salvation," ST 20 February 1893, para. 7.

[230] She writes that in this regard not even the angels are allowed to intrude into the secrets of the Most High and that human beings "are as ignorant of God as little children," MH, 429. She writes about the need of a specific language saying that "the wonderful things I there saw I cannot describe. Oh, that I could talk in the language of Canaan, then could I tell a little of the glory of the better world," EW, 19.

[231] "Christ May Dwell In Your Hearts By Faith," RH 1 October 1889, para. 9.

[232] Lt 8, 9 February 1895.

[233] "The Fall of Our First Parents," Ms 140, 27 September 1903, para. 28.

[234] "Child life of Jesus," ST 30 July 1896, para. 3. White also writes as follows: "The doctrine of the incarnation of Christ in human flesh is a mystery, 'even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations.' It is the great and profound mystery of godliness. 'The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.' Christ took upon Himself human nature, a nature inferior to His heavenly nature. Nothing so shows the wonderful condescension of God as this He 'so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son.' John presents this wonderful subject with such simplicity that all may grasp the ideas set forth, and be enlightened," in "The Word Made Flesh," RH 5 April 1906, para. 3.

open field in White's writings. In fact, in a relevant contribution penned in 1898, White affirms that Christ was a real man and that the humanity of the Son of God is essential as a subject of study. She defines the Incarnation as "God in the flesh,"[235] a rewarding study and a "fruitful field, which will repay the searcher who digs deep for hidden truth."[236]

She continues elaborating on what I defined as her *katapetasma* model of Incarnation – Incarnation as a human veil hiding divinity – numerous times in her writing. She says that Christ "presents before us his two natures, divine and human,"[237] and he "was made in the likeness of man: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death.' He voluntarily assumed human nature. It was his own act, and by his own consent. He clothed his divinity with humanity."[238] His human nature constituted a way to 'cover' his divinity with the human form, a fashion that could not but only disguise his deity. This is remarked again as follows:

> He was God while upon earth, but he divested himself of the form of God, and in its stead took the form and fashion of a man. He walked the earth as a man. For our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich. He laid aside his glory and his majesty. He was God, but the glories of the form of God he for a while relinquished.[239]

While affirming his full divinity by saying that "he was God" White once more attests that the demonstrations of his divinity were veiled in human nature. Fully God, Christ relinquished the glories of the divine form for the purpose of salvation. In White's mind, it is clear that if Christ had not surrendered his divine qualities to his humanity, then his sacrifice would have been senseless. By leaving aside his divine prerogatives, he set an example for us in the fact that he overcame sin, as everyone can do with his help. Therefore, becoming human does not imply forsaking divinity for White. The two natures follow existing together. Christ is as much God (or divine) as in his pre-existence and as much another person independent from the Father as any human being from

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[235] "Search the Scriptures no.1," YI 13 October 1898, "The humanity of the Son of God is everything to us. It is the golden chain that binds our souls to Christ, and through Christ to God. This is to be our study. Christ was a real man; he gave proof of his humility in becoming a man. Yet he was God in the flesh."

[236] Ibid., "When we approach this subject, we would do well to heed the words spoken by Christ to Moses at the burning bush, "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." We should come to this study with the humility of a learner, with a contrite heart. And the study of the incarnation of Christ is a fruitful field, which will repay the searcher who digs deep for hidden truth."

[237] "Christ Man's example," RH 5 July 1887, para. 3.

[238] Ibid., para. 4.

[239] Ibid.

another one. As she posits that "Christ's humanity was united with divinity,"[240] does this mean that his divine attributes remain also to his disposition? If the previous statement regarding his full divinity results correct, then Christ possessed the full attributes of his deity, but he did not use them independently and for his own benefit. This is what White seems to believe.[241]

In fact, when she argues that Christ took human nature fully and lived it fully, White is sure that this was not make-believe humanity.[242] Although Christ was one with the Father, he "stepped down from the glorious throne in heaven, laid aside his royal robe and crown, and clothed his divinity with humanity, thus bringing himself to the level of man's feeble faculties."[243] White consistently uses the language of 'dressing', by adopting terms such as 'veil' and 'cloth', to describe the Incarnational process that 'combined' the divine and human natures of Christ. This process brought Christ to the level of "man's feeble faculties." This was done in "the garb of humanity."[244] Therefore, White remarks that the Incarnation means that Christ truly lived "the life that human beings must live from childhood to manhood, bearing the trials that they must bear."[245]

In 1895, she writes also that "the union of the divine with the human is one of the most mysterious, as well as the most precious, truths of the plan of redemption. It is of this that Paul speaks when he says, 'Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh.' 1 Tim. 3:16."[246] White believes that finite minds cannot grasp all that the Incarnation implies. At the same time, her attention is not specifically on questions of natures but on what the

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[240] DA, 123.

[241] See John 5:17-19, 5:30, 8:28, 14:10. See also Lt 106, 26 June 1896, in 5BC, 1124, "Christ worked no miracles in His own behalf. He was compassed with infirmities, but His divine nature knew what was in man. He needed not that any should testify to Him of this. The Spirit was given Him without measure; for His mission on earth demanded this."

[242] "It was not a make-believe humanity that Christ took upon Himself. He took human nature and lived human nature," Lt 106, 26 June 1896, in 5BC, 1124. In another letter, only a few years later, White writes that "When Jesus took human nature, and became in fashion as a man, He possessed all the human organism. His necessities were the necessities of a man. He had bodily wants to be supplied, bodily weariness to be relieved. By prayer to the Father He was braced for duty and for trial," Lt 32, 14 February 1899 (to brother and sister Muckersey).

[243] "The Precious Promises," RH 11 December 1888, para. 10.

[244] "A Teacher sent from God," ST 17 May 1905, para. 5.

[245] Ibid.

[246] Ellen G. White, "Extracts from 'Life of Christ,'" in *General Conference Bulletin* 25 February 1895.

Incarnation could achieve. The main purpose of the Incarnation is to bring divine power to the reach of humanity and make it partaker of the divine nature as divinity becomes partaker of humanity.[247]

Therefore, and without intending a pre-lapsarian position but a more embracing concept of human nature, she writes that the Son of God incarnate "vanquished Satan in the same nature over which in Eden Satan obtained the victory"[248] and that he truly triumphed over temptation in his human nature,[249] and not in his divine one.[250] In fact, in an article published in 1892 under the title "The Divine-Human Nature of Christ," she tries to clarify every possible suspicion that Christ could have had a nature somewhat different from humankind:

> We need not place the obedience of Christ by itself, as something for which He was particularly adapted, by His particular divine nature, for He stood before God as man's representative and was tempted as man's substitute and surety. If Christ had a special power which it is not the privilege of man to have, Satan would have made capital of this matter. The work of Christ was to take from the claims of Satan his control of man, and He could do this only in the way that He came—a man, tempted as a man, rendering the obedience of a man.[251]

By emptying himself and becoming incarnate, Christ placed himself in the very same position as the human race as a whole, with no advantages. He was a human being like anyone else, and "he came as a man, and rendered the obedience of human nature to the only true God. He came not to show us what God could do, but what God did do, and what man, a partaker of the divine nature, can do."[252] Therefore, White strongly remarks that the Incarnation is an event in time and history that brought the Son of God to assume a fully human nature without forsaking his divine one. This is done because of the need for redemption and victory over sin. This is why Christ "came as a man,

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[247] Ibid., "While it is impossible for finite minds fully to grasp this great truth, or to fathom its significance, we may learn from it lessons of vital importance to us in our struggles against temptation. Christ came to the world to bring divine power to humanity, to make man a partaker of the divine nature."

[248] "After the Crucifixion," YI 25 April 1901, para. 11.

[249] Ibid., "The enemy was overcome by Christ in his human nature. The power of the Saviour's Godhead was hidden. He overcame in human nature, relying upon God for power. This is the privilege of all. In proportion to our faith will be our victory."

[250] "It was the human nature of Christ that endured the temptations in the wilderness, not His divine nature. In His human nature He endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself. He lived a perfect human life. Jesus is everything to us, and He says to us, 'Without Me ye can do nothing,'" Lt 128, 9 July 1896, in 14MR No. 1130 (to Mrs Mary Watson, Ellen G. White's niece).

[251] "The Divine-Human Nature of Christ," Ms 1, 15 November 1892, para. 19; published also in in ST 10 April 1893 (with the title "Overcome as Christ overcame").

[252] Lt 128, 9 July 1896, in 14MR No. 1130.

to be tempted as a man, rendering the obedience of a man […], and overcame as humanity overcome."[253] As a man, he was tempted as anyone else, not in a different way.

It appears clear that White's idea of the Incarnation is crucially connected to the provision for redemption. Within this soteriological-theological frame, the question of the unity of divine and human nature finds its place in White's argument. Without a doubt, White highlights several times Christ's divinity[254] and his unity with the Father.[255] However, she is convinced that the process of the Incarnation is somewhat irreversible. Christ cannot 'return' to his divine nature apart from his human one. In order to save humanity from sin, the Son became "one of the human family, forever to retain His human nature."[256] The two natures are now joined together eternally. This seems to be coherent with White's idea of a temptable and peccable Christ and much more (as it will be shown) with that of infinite risk. If, on the one hand, Christ is the Son of the Father, one with him in character and purpose, eternal and self-existing, on the other, he embraces humanity in its highest and most profound sense, becoming one with it. Christ is one with the Father as he is one with humankind. Thus, unity is a relational status. Somehow, as Christ is one with his Father in the divine sphere, human beings replicate that oneness in the human sphere through perfect unity.[257]

But, while being human, Christ maintained his divine nature and individuality. As the Son of God, he entered the world in "human form. Laying aside his royal robe and kingly crown, he clothed his divinity with humanity, that humanity through his infinite sacrifice might become partakers of the divine nature, and escape the corruption that is in the world through lust."[258] Christ left his divine

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[253] "Overcome as Christ overcame," ST 10 April 1893, para. 3.

[254] "Again the priests and rabbis cried out against Jesus as a blasphemer. His claim to be one with God had before stirred them to take His life, and a few months later they plainly declared, "For a good work we stone Thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that Thou, being a man, makest Thyself God." John 10:33. Because He was, and avowed Himself to be, the Son of God, they were bent on destroying Him," DA, 469-470. "Before the foundations of the earth were laid, the Father and the Son had united in a covenant to redeem man if he should be overcome by Satan. They had clasped their hands in a solemn pledge that Christ should become the surety for the human race. This pledge Christ has fulfilled. When upon the cross He cried out, "It is finished," He addressed the Father," DA, 834.

[255] See DA, 22.

[256] DA, 25.

[257] "The most convincing argument we can give to the world of Christ's mission is to be found in perfect unity. Such oneness as exists between the Father and the Son is to be manifest among all who believe the truth," in "One, Even as We are One," Ms 88, np. 1905, para. 6.

[258] "Circulate the Publications, No. 1," RH 6 August 1908, para. 14.

and royal robe to clothe his divinity with humanity. Consequently, the Incarnation provides the way for humanity to become a partaker of the divine nature.[259]

It is particularly important to highlight that White understands herself to be inspired to write what she sees or receives by divine revelation. In what she defines as a moment of vision of divine realities, she sees only one throne for both the Father and the Son, but she highlights that the person of the Father is 'differently' accessible with respect to that of the Son. Actually, it is not possible to see the Father. She writes,

> I saw a throne, and on it sat the Father and the Son. I gazed on Jesus' countenance and admired His lovely person. The Father's person I could not behold, for a cloud of glorious light covered Him. I asked Jesus if His Father had a form like Himself. He said He had, but I could not behold it, for said He, 'If you should once behold the glory of His person, you would cease to exist.'[260]

She states that she could admire the person of Christ, but, on the contrary, she could not behold the Father's face. The occasion offers the way to an important affirmation: the Father has a form like the Son. This is coherent with the general understanding of White regarding the divine nature of the Son. One of White's numerous reflections on the crucifixion is in this same line of thought. She talks of the 'divine Sufferer' who hangs upon the cross and of the angels, with intense emotion, asking why the Father does not intervene in the scene and save his only Son. She affirms that "Christ was not alone in making his great sacrifice. It was the fulfilment of the covenant made between him and his Father before the foundation of the world was laid."[261] In these words, the Incarnation is the result of a precise plan, a covenant made between the Father and the Son to save humanity from sin and perdition. Within this conceptual frame, the divine sufferer, Christ, is not alone. The Incarnation is thus a process that invites divinity to unite with humanity. It is not only the person of Christ engaging with human nature. The Father is also, in a certain way, part of the picture. The Incarnation is not only the moment when the divine Son of God 'meets' the human carpenter of

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[259] "The grace of Christ has made it possible that there be a close union between the receiver and the Giver. Those to whom God reveals by his Spirit the truths of his Word will be able to testify to an understanding of that mystery of godliness which from eternal ages has been hid in the Father and the Son," in "As Ye Have Received…So Walk," RH 19 August 1909, para. 9.

[260] EW, 54.

[261] "The Price of our Redemption," YI 14 June 1900, para. 3.

Nazareth, but it is also the encounter of divinity with humanity in its broadest and deepest sense. The Incarnation is the opportunity for divinity and humanity to join together.

This is why White always highlights that through Christ, man may become a partaker of the divine nature.[262] White constantly emphasises this redemptive goal of the mysterious joining of divine and human nature. As humanity could not endure the sight of Christ's divine form, "the contrast would have been too painful, the glory too overwhelming […],"[263] Christ came in the likeness of men. He was God while on earth, but he "divested Himself of the form of God, and in its stead took the form and fashion of a man. He walked the earth as a man. […] He was God, but the glories of the form of God He for a while relinquished. […] He walked the earth unrecognized, unconfessed."[264] Thus, one of the purposes of Christ veiling divinity with humanity, without parting from his divinity, was for human beings to be able to bear the revelation of God.[265] As a "divine-human Saviour, He came to stand at the head of the fallen race, to share in their experience from childhood to manhood."[266] For White, Christ was indeed the divine-human Saviour; therefore, he did not exchange his divinity for humanity but veiled it with humanity.[267]

Therefore, it is evident that White's concept of the Incarnation is that Christ's divine glory had to be veiled and eclipsed for a time by assuming humanity. This does not mean he ceased to be God while becoming a man. He was "equal with the Father in dignity and glory, and yet wearing the garb of humanity! Divinity and humanity were mysteriously combined, and man and God became one."[268] There is not a sort of reciprocal substitution, and the "the two expressions 'human' and 'divine' were, in Christ, closely and inseparably one, and yet they had a distinct individuality."[269]

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[262] "The great gift of salvation has been placed within our reach at an infinite cost to the Father and the Son. To neglect salvation is to neglect the knowledge of the Father, and of the Son, whom God hath sent in order that man might become a partaker of the divine nature, and thus, with Christ, an heir of all things," in "Peril of Neglecting Salvation," RH 10 March 1891, para. 2.

[263] "The Barren Fig Tree," ST 15 February 1899, para. 6.

[264] "Christ Man's Example," RH 5 July 1887, para. 4.

[265] On this topic, White writes also the following: "The King of glory stooped low to take humanity. Rude and forbidding were His earthly surroundings. His glory was veiled, that the majesty of His outward form might not become an object of attraction. He shunned all outward display. Riches, worldly honor, and human greatness can never save a soul from death; Jesus purposed that no attraction of an earthly nature should call men to His side. Only the beauty of heavenly truth must draw those who would follow Him," DA, 43.

[266] "Lessons from the Second Chapter of Philippians," RH 15 June 1905, para. 12.

[267] "Satan's Malignity Against Christ and His People," RH 29 October 1895, para. 6.

[268] "Child life of Jesus," ST 30 July 1896, para. 3.

[269] "Christ Glorified," ST 10 May 1899, para. 11.

Humanity and divinity coexist in Christ, unified yet distinct, preserving individuality while inseparably intertwined.

White writes extensively in this direction and, though not exhaustively, this section has offered a sense of White's model of the Incarnation: a divinity clothed by the garb of humanity. It has especially served the purpose of framing the question of infinite risk within White's comprehension of the role and interaction of the two natures in Christ. This has been a necessary overview that, together with the following section on Christ's im/peccability, constitutes a solid ground to understand better the core investigation of the risk Christ took in coming to save humankind.

For White, the Incarnation is an event in which "though Christ humbled Himself to become man, the Godhead was still His own."[270] However, most importantly, White claims that Christ's "deity could not be lost while He stood faithful and true to His loyalty."[271] Thus, White emphasises that Christ's deity could not be lost but only "while he stood faithful." In other words, if Christ had sinned, he would have been lost as a divine being. This is exactly what White's infinite risk theology claims. But, if there is a possibility for Christ to lose his divine life, White's understanding of the communion of Father and Son must also be different from mainstream theology. In some way, there should be some susceptibility to change in reference to intra-Trinitarian life.

In this line of thoughts, she argues that when the Son was human, the communion between him and the Father, as divine beings, still existed throughout all his earthly life, but that at the cross "for the time the visible communion between the Father and the Son was ended."[272] Despite the vital connection between the two,[273] the cross created a momentary disruption. If the cross could create a momentary disruption in that vital and visible connection between Father and Son, could that be an eternal separation, had Christ sinned? Could there be a change in God? The next section will lay some further ground on whether Christ could then be tempted, sin, and die forever as divine, by discussing how White's Incarnation model impacts the Trinitarian view of divine immutability.

[270] "Christ Glorified," ST 10 May 1899, para. 11.

[271] Ibid.

[272] DA, 625.

[273] Ibid., 664, "If the disciples believed this vital connection between the Father and the Son, their faith would not forsake them when they saw Christ's suffering and death to save a perishing world."

3.1.2 Was Christ Immutable?

What does it mean that at the cross the "visible communion between the Father and the Son was ended"? How does this ended communion relate to the claim that 'God does not change'? Which implications does this claim have for the question of impeccability and, most of all, infinite risk? Admittedly, the divine nature is *per se* perfect and therefore incapable of sin and not in need of change. Generally, the so-called God's immutability, as a divine attribute, is understood as referring to God's constant character and immutable will (at times called 'weak immutability') or even to a sort of being intrinsically and naturally unchanging in his divine status ('strong immutability'). In other words, it consists of the claim that God cannot undergo any real change, not in his intentions, character, knowledge, and nature. Therefore, God is not involved in processes of development such as learning, growing, and even beginning or finishing.

Consequently, it would be impossible for the Son of God to commit sin and pay the consequences of it or thus to be utterly separated from the Father. Concepts such as immutability and indivisibility are ontologically connected. Isaak A. Dorner would radically describe God's immutability as follows:

> God appears as a living person, but also as the unconditional self-identical being that is free from contradictions. 'I am who I am' signifies that this absolute being is who he is and has always been, without beginning. But it also implies that he will remain what he is and therefore will never change or cease to be what and who he is. He is the being that rests utterly upon himself and as self-sufficient depends on nothing else.[274]

Dorner's widely representative view implies that God, free from change, is the absolute being who never ceases to be what and who he is. Therefore, how can the Son of God be tempted, sin, suffer, be separated from the Father, and risk his eternal existence? This claim goes along with the idea that the Incarnation may not produce any change to the Trinity. Trinity may not be affected by the life of the incarnated Son of God. Throughout Christian history, the various convergent perspectives on God's immutability point to the understanding of it as an expression of God's perfection and nature.

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[274] Isaak A. Dorner, *Divine Immutability: A Critical Reconsideration* (trans. Robert R. Williams and Claude Welch; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), 85-86.

Within this idea as a basis, changelessness becomes, in a sense, a synonym for perfection.[275] Therefore, classical theistic thought has seen divine immutability as one of the essential attributes of God, as God may not be other than perfect. This has historically been part of the Christian tradition.[276] Several theologians and philosophers, the list would be too extensive to be mentioned, discussed the question of divine immutability from various perspectives. However, the main idea has been largely based on a kind of perfect-being theology. God should necessarily be perfectly wise; therefore, he cannot change. Following this same line of thought, God may not improve or deteriorate. Being perfect means that God cannot be better than what he is. The opposite is also true; he is immune to any change for the worse. If God can never change, he already possesses all the attributes he must possess. If he is immutable, then his character and nature are perfect in space and time: God is always what he can be.

There are surely different ways of looking at immutability. For example, one may say that God is static or does not act in anything outside himself. This is a kind of Aristotelian God who is eternally just contemplating himself with no mind for anything around himself.[277] For example, Augustine argued that as in creation temporal things were created, then God created time.[278] Consequently, the eternal God is outside time. Because only temporal things that exist in time can change, then God cannot change as he is beyond time, intrinsically. In a sense, God's timelessness leads to divine immutability. Following this train of thought, as God is not subjected to the past or future, he does not change.

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[275] See also Boethius, "The Consolation of Philosophy" in *Boethius: The Theological Tractates* (trans. H. Stewart and E.K. Rand; Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 1936). Boethius engages extensively here with questions of time, eternity and changes.

[276] On divine immutability see also Richard Sorabji, *Time, Creation and the Continuum* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983) where there is a clear treatment of a number of issues related to this doctrine; William E. Mann, "Immutability and Predication," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* (1987) 22 (1): 21–39, where there is a clear argumentation on the connection between divine simplicity and immutability; Paul Helm, *Eternal God* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1988), which includes an interesting discussion on the links between immutability and omniscience. An historical survey, considering issues such as divine emotion, immutability and impassibility may be found in Joseph M. Hallman, "The Mutability of God: Tertullian to Lactantius," *Theological Studies* (1981) 42 (3): 373–393.

[277] See Richard McKeon (ed.) *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York, NY: Random House, 1941). In his *Physics*, Aristotle treats the nature of change and the existence of God, see *Aristotle's Physics: A Guided Study* (trans. Joe Sachs; New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1995).

[278] See Augustine, *De Genesi ad Litteram* (trans. J.H. Taylor; *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*; 2 vols.; New York, NY: Newman, 1982), 401-415.

Another approach to the question is taken with respect to the doctrine of divine simplicity. Aquinas' contribution is an example of this, as he derives his idea of divine immutability from the doctrine of divine simplicity.[279] In other words, if God has no parts of any sort nor distinct attributes, he cannot change because only parts of an entire may change. In this way, God's simplicity and immutability have just been part of the understanding of this doctrine of God, at least since the time of Plato (actually from the pre-socratics). [280]

A certain approach to Scriptures may tend to search for confirmation of this doctrinal belief in biblical passages affirming that God does not change.[281] However, the question is: What does that really mean? The answer may not be the same for all. In the end, immutability is the result of a convergence of ideas, arguments, concepts, and intuitions, of which the above are just some examples of intricate reasoning. Anyway, is there then a way for God to cease being who he is? This would give ground to the possibility of sin and eternal death.

In recent years, and especially in the 19th century, many theologians started criticizing this notion that God is unchangeable because they argued God changes all the time in Scripture. The Hebrew Bible narrative tells of God relenting, repenting, and changing his mind about his judgements. This attitude has been seen as indicative of God being able to change. However, if, on the one hand, God's providence seems to point to him as changing according to necessities, or acting in history in response to changes, doing things which were not and now are, on the other, it might be said that his new acts rest within his omniscience and pre-knowledge. If he had worked a miracle, he knew already that he would have done it; therefore, there is no real change. God knows all and never has new decisions to make.

It is undoubtedly true that whenever Scriptures talk of God changing his mind or emotions, these anthropomorphisms are part of an analogic language necessary to transmit an intelligible message.

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[279] Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* (trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province; 3 vols.; New York, NY: Benziger Brothers, 1948), Part I. Q. 9. Art. 1-2.

[280] See Plato, *Republic* (trans. G. Grube and C. Reeve; Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1992), II 381 b-c. Plato here treats divine immutability within a broader discussion on human nature.

[281] e.g. Malachi 3:6 "For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, have not perished;" James 1:17 "Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change!" See also Numbers 23:19, Isaiah 40:8, Isaiah 40:28, Psalm 90:2, Psalm 102:25-27, 1 Timothy 1:17, 2 Timothy 2:13, Hebrews 13:8. See also "On the Unchangeableness of God" in Francis H. Colson and George H. Whitaker (trans), *Philo* (vol.3; Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 1960). Philo discusses Scriptural texts that challenge divine immutability.

Francis Pieper (1852-1931) has a valuable discussion on this issue in his *Christliche Dogmatik*.[282] Within human's limited intellectual capacities, reaching a comprehensive understanding of God is impossible. Therefore, all sorts of human imagery in the Bible are mainly instruments to talk of the transcendent God. Hence, those biblical references somehow portraying changes in God using anthropomorphic language may well serve to describe the various actions he takes in his omniscience. Then, this biblical anthropomorphism has not to do with describing God as having uncertainties or imperfections.

The process theology developed on Alfred North Whitehead's (1861-1947) process philosophy within the twentieth century argues that God is continually in a process of change.[283] Therefore, various theologians such as Colin E. Gunton (1941-2003) and Robert W. Jenson (1930-2017) have advanced a strong idea of 'change'.[284] So, the idea that God is unchangeable has been criticized on a number of different fronts. At times, it has been said not to be biblical, and there have been philosophical criticisms in terms of a classical theistic tradition.[285]

For the sake of this investigation, when one talks about immutability, the question of the Incarnation arises basically anytime. If God is unchangeable, how can God become human? Obviously, the two different states of God, being at once divine and then human, may bring scholars to believe that God may indeed change from one nature to another. It may be the case that a particular understanding of immutability would not allow for this possibility, especially if one argues that immutability means that God is static and not active and that every form of change implies 'imperfection'. The doctrine of immutability does not generally hold the idea that God cannot change things outside of his nature. Scholastic language may sometimes be used to explain this. There is a difference between passive potency and active potency. Within this logic, God does not

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[282] Francis Pieper, *Christliche Dogmatik,* (4 vols.; St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1917–1924; in English: *Christian Dogmatics,* [4 vols., St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1950–1953]).

[283] See William L. Reese and Eugene Freeman (eds.), *Process and Divinity: The Hartshorne Festschrift* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1964); John B. Cobb Jr. and David R. Griffin, *Process Theology: an Introductory Exposition* (Belfast: Christian Journals Ltd., 1976); Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1984).

[284] Colin E. Gunton, *Act and Being: Towards a Theology of the Divine Attributes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003; first published in 2002 in the UK by SCM Press); Idem, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2003); Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1: The Triune God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[285] Scriptural texts depicting God changing his feelings or decisions (e.g. Genesis 6:6) have been used to endorse the opinion that God can change.

have passive potency; in other words, he does not have the potential to be acted on by things outside of himself to change him. But, if he has active potency, he can actively do things outside of himself to activate the potentiality in other things. Therefore, God is active in changing things outside of himself.

Immutability claims that in the Incarnation, there is no change in the divine nature. This would be in line with the idea that God has no passive potency as he is not acted upon by external powers. In this sense, the divine nature remains immutable and unchangeable. Human nature is assumed into the divine in the Son of God. This means that God receives something from outside himself, which is the true and fully human nature. However, human nature does not inherently change divine nature. For example, through the communication of the attributes of divinity to Christ's humanity miracles could be worked through Christ's human nature. Then, the Son of God was not limited in his humanity. In this line of thought, all the changes the Incarnation involved occurred in human nature which God the Son assumed, rather than in God. Within this concept, divinity is not altered through the Incarnation. However, I must recognize that there are different ways of understanding immutability, simplicity, or any of the classical theistic terms addressing some of these general basic attributes of God even beyond the Christian tradition. Ultimately, with different levels of agreement, divine immutability refers to God who is not subject to extrinsic nor intrinsic changes, as he is omniscient and eternal. This theological perspective, therefore, denies that God can begin or cease to be: he is immutable with respect to existence.[286]

Nevertheless, the Incarnation in itself constitutes a 'sort of' change as there has never been a human-divine being before Christ, even if this was already in God's eternal pre-science. As suggested in the nineteenth century, the communication of attributes may go both ways. Even human attributes could be communicated to the divine nature so that the divine nature may incur certain human limitations due to this communication. This reverse aspect may raise several questions. If, on the one hand, one could say that God – in his omniscience – was eternally ready to be incarnate, therefore, this did not constitute a change, on the other, the question arises: could he have had, since eternity, those experiences proper of the earthly human nature, which the Incarnation made part of God's life? The question of divine 'potency', whether passive or active, could perhaps offer

[286] See also the valuable contributions on the question of immutability of Weinandy, *Does God Change?*; Gerald F. O'Hanlon, *The Immutability of God in the theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

the basis to think of the Incarnation as the ground for a specific change. In other words, does the Incarnation imply the assumption of human nature in the divine in a way even more permanent and invasive than ever thought before? White does think that humanity and divinity are joined forever in the person of Christ even after the post-resurrection ascension into heaven, as it will be discussed further, and that humanity plays a decisive role in the Incarnation. This would somehow imply a 'sort of' change and, consequently, the option of committing sin and ceasing to exist for the Son of God. White's infinite risk theology challenges the claim that the divine nature of the Son of God and the intra-Trinitarian life are not somehow altered by human nature.

In other words, what is the nature of the death of Christ? How does this relate to the divine nature? If Christ suffered on the cross as the Son of God, has only his humanity suffered? Can the person be separated from nature, and can it be asserted that only the person of the Son of God endured suffering and not his divine nature, which thus remained unaffected? Would, instead, the person be indissolubly bound to his nature, so that some kind of ontological change may happen within the divine essence once joined with the human one? Would a suffering God still be God? Does a suffering God require a mutable God?

A way of thinking of this is to hold the view that in the Incarnation, there is instead a permanent blending, or mixture, of divinity and humanity so that as divinity may influence humanity, so humanity may have an effect or produce a change in divinity, while the incarnate Christ keeps both natures fully in one person. Keeping the core idea that immutability suggests that God may not change in his nature and attributes, I see it necessary to consider here how White's infinite risk suggests a 'change' instead. Therefore, I will turn my attention now to how divinity could be mutable in reference to the attribute of its eternal existence and how White's view has relevant Trinitarian and Christological implications.

3.1.3 White's Incarnational Mutability Model and its Trinitarian Implications

Given the theological context of this analysis, if Christ, as the Son of God incarnate, cannot undergo any change due to his divine nature, he also cannot cease to exist and, consequently, his communion with the Father cannot come to an end. If there is no passive potency in God, he should be maximally alive. Oppositely, the idea of Christ risking his eternal existence as the Son of God requires thinking about his divine nature, somehow subjected to a sort of change in nature.

However, it may be argued that in order to be perfect, he may not be finite. Therefore, claiming that Christ, as the Son of God, could consent to sin and lose his eternal existence does not seem to be compatible with the concept of his immutability. The two claims are apparently contradictory.

What White's infinite risk implies with respect to immutability and impeccability, as will be further explained in the following sections and chapters of this work, may also challenge Adventist theology, as previously seen in the context of Trinitarian and Christological views with her tradition. The Adventist theologian Canale, explaining the doctrine of God in a mainstream Adventist publication, expresses a concept in line with current Trinitarian theology in various Christian contexts: "Immutability is another characteristic of God's being that has been an important component of the Christian doctrine of God through the centuries […] Immutability refers to the absence of change in God. The Bible straightforwardly declares that God does not change (Mal. 3:6; James 1:17)."[287] Canale's biblical references, actually, refer not to God's essence or nature but to his purposes and character. Canale's reasoning is based on biblical hermeneutics not directly related to Christological or Soteriological questions, and that in many respects is questionable in light of White's Christology. When trying to define 'immutability,' Canale continues his argument by saying that the concept must be "understood not as an impassibility but as the eternal identity of God's being with itself and the historical faithfulness, constancy, and consistency of His relation, purposes, and actions toward us" and that this is "is the necessary presupposition for theological ideas such as typology, incarnation, cross, and great controversy between God and Satan as presented throughout the Bible."[288]

Canale includes the concept of 'impassibility' in his reasoning, thus requiring the reader not to think of immutability in such a term. God's impassibility may not be merely understood as the theological idea that God is invulnerable to suffering and emotional changes. This may bring, by syllogism, to the concept of immutability. Weinandy writes that God "does not undergo successive and fluctuating emotional states; nor can the created order alter him in such a way so as to cause him to suffer any modification or loss."[289] However, immutability may not be considered as pointing to a God who is not subjected to emotional changes in any way within his divine sphere. He is indeed

[287] Canale, "Doctrine of God," 109.
[288] Ibid., 110.
[289] Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?*, 111.

an emotional being, as the Scripture may extensively prove. His love is the basis of all his actions. White confirms that the Calvary itself is the expression of an emotional God who suffers and loves,

> God could not express greater love than he has expressed in giving the Son of his bosom to this world. This gift was given to man to convince him that God had left nothing undone that he could do, that there is nothing held in reserve, but that all heaven has been poured out in one vast gift. […] Never can his gift be surpassed, never can he display a richer depth of love. Calvary represents his crowning work.[290]

In the words of White, the Incarnation is the greatest gift that heaven could give, where God, as an emotional being, a God of love, "had left nothing undone that he could do". This opens a wide range of possibilities about what God has done to save humankind. In the mind of White, this implies risking the eternal life of the Son of God. Canale, instead, presents immutability as a static identity tied to 'historical' consistency, "the eternal identity of God's being with itself." Surely, God cannot be more than what and who he is. But, his love for human beings, which is infinite and perfect, is far from apathetic or inert. This is not contrary to the idea of a suffering God (theopaschism) when seen in the broader picture of Christological discourse.[291] One cannot think of God without thinking of the incarnated Son of God, with divinity and humanity joined at the cross, and where emotional changes are not to be understood merely as part of a 'screenplay.' Therefore, Canale's views would not find full agreement with White's when he writes that "since God is eternal and immutable, His trinitarian nature has never changed or come into being."[292] Canale's theological approach to divine nature remains highly questionable if compared to White's contribution to the topic on the question of immutability. While White would agree that God has never come into being, in light of her theology of infinite risk, the cross is a point in time and space for God to witness a 'change': the Son could cease being God. The following final statement of Canale may further highlight the problem, not only within Adventism but in the broader theological context: "[…] since the God of the Bible is one and not many, all the various revelations about Him presented throughout the Bible refer to

[290] "Humanity the Lost Pearl," YI 17 October 1895, para. 2.

[291] For a critical discussion with relevant theopaschistes in modern theology see Paul Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

[292] Canale, "The Doctrine of God," 120-121.

the same, one divine reality and not to a plurality of divine beings."[293] This Trinitarian theology, widely shared, has important implications.

On the one hand, the idea of 'one divine reality' against a 'plurality of divine beings', if not further clarified, may exclude White's understanding of the divine person of Christ as distinct and truly other, with respect to the Father, as previously discussed. Most importantly, it ultimately points to the impossibility for the Son of God to go out of existence if he is 'part' of this trinity-'singleness.' If Christ could instead die, this would bring about something that may be defined as a 'change' in God's nature, at least for the Son of God. In Canale's theology, this would be impossible. This is true also for Trinitarian theology in general. It would be incompatible to hold simultaneously both the view that Christ could have lost his eternal existence and that he is 'part' of an immutable and indivisible Trinity. White's Christology argues the opposite when it points to the potential situation of Christ going out of existence, the 'infinite risk.'

White writes that when the world needed a teacher to declare the truth to every human being, "it was at that time that Christ, seeing the condition of the world, chose to change the order of things. The Commander of all heaven, laying aside His glory, His kingly crown, His royal robe, came to our world, His divinity clothed with humanity, that in His humanity He might touch humanity."[294] The Incarnation is here described as a decision "to change the order of things". While this concept is not fully clarified, laying aside the glory, the crown, and the royal robe to clothe divinity with humanity may well represent part of this 'change'. Even if this change must have been foreseen in God's omniscience, the Incarnation did constitute a change in the order of things and in the 'condition', or nature, of God the Son.

Furthermore, the Incarnation is grounded in the idea that the Son of God left heaven choosing to do so out of free will. The affirmation of free will may in itself appear, at first, already not compatible with an immutable, omniscient and omnipotent God. White writes in 1891 that "when man sinned, the Son of God chose to assume human nature, and come to our world to die for the guilty race. […] he gathered to his dying soul this vast responsibility, taking the sins of the whole world upon himself. Human nature was to him a robe of suffering."[295] Clothing himself with the "robe of suffering" is as much a free will choice as those decisions human beings take every moment.

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[293] Ibid., 121.

[294] "His Glory Shall Be Seen," ST 7 May 1902, para. 6.

[295] "Missionary Work," ST 17 August 1891, para.7.

Christ "chose to assume human nature" and to incarnate and die for the guilty race. He took upon himself the "vast responsibility" of the sins of the whole world.

The fact that Christ chose to suffer does not constitute a humiliation for his divine nature. When he as "our Redeemer consented to take the cup of suffering, in order to save sinners, His capacity for suffering was the only limitation to His suffering. But his humiliation as a man did not in the slightest degree take from his honored identity with the Father. While walking the earth in the form of a servant, he could still affirm, 'I and my Father are one.'"[296] As the incarnate Son of God, in the words of White, Christ suffered to the limits and extremes of his capacity of endurance or his 'pain threshold'. This suffering is, therefore, to be understood as lived in both the divine and human nature of the Son of God and without constituting a threat to his divine nature. This suffering is full and true in its highest sense. In this line of thought, one of the consequences of sin is exactly that of humanity and all creation becoming mortal and mutable, and subject to suffering, as expressed in Romans 8 and 9. However, suppose the union of divinity with humanity becomes the way to reverse the situation. In that case, White's Christology points to a specific challenge that the Incarnation entails: the role and influence of human nature over the divine one instead of the opposite. Can human nature fundamentally alter the divine essence? White's infinite risk theology seems to point towards this direction.

As a historical fact, Arius shared a similar conceptual ground with White on the question of the changeable nature of Christ. White would surely generally disagree with Arius' views of the Son of God, especially regarding his pre-existence. Arius held the opinion that the Son was not always; that there was a time in which he was not and was then 'created,' named Wisdom and Word after God's attributes, and therefore not verily God. White, instead, clearly regards the eternal nature of the Son and his full sharing of the same divine nature as a distinct person from the Father but equally God in its highest sense.

When Athanasius, arch-opponent of Arius, speaks of the beliefs of Arius, he quotes portions from the writings of Arius, especially *The Thalia.* One of these quotations deals with Arius' view of immutability as follows,

[296] "The New Commandment – part. 1," YI 16 December 1897, para. 6.

> And by nature, as all others, so the Word Himself is alterable, and remains good by His own free will, while He chooseth; when, however, He wills, He can alter as we can, as being of an alterable nature. For 'therefore,' saith he, 'as foreknowing that He would be good, did God by anticipation bestow on Him this glory, which afterwards, as man, He attained from virtue. Thus in consequence of His works fore-known, did God bring it to pass that He being such, should come to be.'[297]

According to Athanasius, Arius believed that "the Word Himself is alterable." With this, Arius meant that Christ had the choice to reject sin because of his own free will. This is why he spoke of 'alterable nature.' Although God knows everything, Christ obtained glory as a man because of his virtuous life. This was obviously not believed by the Council of Nicaea, where the debates upon this question and others brought to the development of many of the present-day Trinitarian beliefs that strongly hold God's immutability.

White has never used the term 'alterable' in reference to Christ. Within the broader Christological understanding of Arius, this term may indicate far more than Christ's free will as a human being. Although she would agree with Arius that Christ could choose sin and his nature could be mutable, she would rather speak of this as a possibility entailing the outcome of eternal death in a way similar to what would happen to every human sinner. However, this is not due to the created nature of God the Son believed by Arius, but because the Incarnation brought the divine and eternal Son of God to join fully the human mortal nature with all its weaknesses, sufferings, fragility, vulnerability and consequences.

White addresses the possibility for Christ to commit sin and cease to exist but with no reference to terms such as 'im/mutability.' Nevertheless, it is evident that her concept of what may be called 'mutability' is exclusively related to the consequences of the joint divine-human nature in the Incarnation, i.e. the possibility for Christ to sin and die. It is when Christ, as a divine being, in the words of White, 'veiled' his divinity with the robe of humanity that his divine nature was permanently linked to the human one in a way that Christ could risk his eternal life.

The Council of Nicaea refused Arius' views, and White would surely reject many of Arius' ideas. Her starting ground is not, as for Arius, the idea that somehow there was a time when Christ did not

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[297] Athanasius, *Discourses against the Arians* (Discourse 1, ch. 2, *'Extracts from the Thalia of Arius'*), in Mary Gerhart, and Fabian Udoh (eds.), *The Christianity Reader* (Chicago, IL, and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 303.

exist. Coming into existence is already the ground for Arius's view of mutability. That is why the final Nicaean creed strongly highlighted the immutability of Christ and his eternal existence, calling 'anathema' those who would have supported contrary ideas such as that there was a time when Christ was not or that he is of a different substance or essence from the Father, and that he might be subject to change.

White would surely disagree with Arius' idea that Christ was brought forth at a point in eternity. Joining on this point with Nicea, White claims Christ's eternal divine nature and existence. White would also argue that Christ had the same nature as the Father but a distinct one, the same substance but not a consubstantial nature, not part of a single essence. The fear of making Christ, God the Son, someone lower than God the Father, or of a lesser value or even a creature, has been at the basis of concepts such as the indivisibility of the three persons and their immutability, which have become over time core doctrinal stands after Nicaea. White does not ever discuss the question of 'infinite risk' and Christ being able to sin in terms of a lower nature. She always upholds Christ as the eternal Son of God. However, in the end, White's main concept is that Christ could have sinned and this implies a sort of 'mutability', at least temporal and limited in the space and time of the Incarnation and due to it.

As previously noted, White does not espouse the idea of consubstantiality. She claims that from eternity, Father and Son were two individualities. On this rests her belief that the two are "yet little short of being identical,"[298] pointing to their individual existence. Clearly distinguishing the two persons, she highlights that Father and Son are one at the level of spirit, heart, and character.[299] Moreover, in the same context, while "from eternity there was a complete unity between the Father and the Son" even if they were two, she also adds that the death on Calvary's cross is both the expression of divine love, "the depth of which no sounding can ever fathom," and the perception of God's divine compassion in which, in a sense, "the sufferings of the Son were the sufferings of the Father."[300] This idea is supported by numerous others penned by White, projecting the analysis into an even more complex horizon where the Father also suffers. Therefore, even if Father and Son share all their divine attributes, White's concept of 'infinite risk' challenges the idea of indivisibility between the two and of the immutability of the divine nature of the Son of God at the Incarnation.

[298] "The New Commandment – part. 1," YI 16 December 1897, para. 5.

[299] See "One, Even as We are One," Ms 88, np. 1905, para. 6.

[300] "The New Commandment – part. 1," YI 16 December 1897, para. 5.

White's idea of this sort of 'circumstantial mutability', or 'incarnational mutability', is contrary to the idea of indivisibility, which is at the basis of the theological argument that Christ could have not ever forfeited his eternal existence. Consequently, Christ could not have sinned, or even in the remote case, he would not have paid any consequence. However, this may make the Father appear unjust, as he would act differently in dealing with human beings as sinners and with his Son. This would surely be inconsistent with the idea of a righteous God portrayed in the Scriptures.

As previously noted, the complexity of this issue is reflected in numerous Christological discourses among scholars in Adventism and beyond.[301] The Adventist theologian Mueller writes in 2008, "Each person of the Godhead is by nature and essence God, and the fullness of the deity dwells in each of them. On the other hand, each person of the Godhead is inseparably connected to the other two."[302] This idea that the three persons are 'inseparably connected' is a reinforcement of Mueller's statement that "There is only one God (Deut. 6:4), however, Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all called God (Matthew 27:46, John 20:28: Acts 5:3-4). Consequently, we do not worship three Gods, but one God who reveals Himself in and consists of three 'persons.' The three persons share one indivisible nature."[303] This idea is in line with mainstream Trinitarian doctrines largely accepted. In fact, Mueller holds the concept that there is "one undivided God."[304] This classical Trinitarian idea calls for the impossibility for Christ to cease ever to exist because, being part of the 'one/single-substance' God, he may not ever 'alter' or 'mutate' his nature and may not ever forfeit his eternal divine nature.[305] However, White's concept of distinction in the persons of the divinity, which could well pave the way to the infinite risk theology, questions the idea that God's divine nature is

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[301] See Moon, "The Adventist Trinity Debate Part 1: Historical Overview"; Ralph Larson, *The Word Was Made Flesh: One Hundred Years of Seventh Day Adventist Christology 1852-1952* (Cherry Valley, CA: The Cherrystone Press, 1986).

[302] Mueller, "Reflections," 9.

[303] Mueller, "Reflections," 9.

[304] Ibid., "In the divine unity there are three coeternal and coequal persons, who, though distinct, are the one undivided God."

[305] Fortman, a Jesuit priest, writes in 1972 a comprehensive book titled *The Triune God* where he analyses the history of the doctrine. He admits frankly that both Testaments are not explicit regarding the doctrine of a God of 'one substance' in three persons. He writes that even the writers of the New Testament "give us no formal or formulated doctrine of the Trinity, no explicit teaching that in one God there are three co-equal divine persons." Fortman expresses what is at the core of the Trinitarian doctrine: in one God three co-equal divine persons. He believes, anyway, that the Bible may provide the data from which the formal doctrine of the Triune God was formulated around three centuries after the church of the Apostles of the 1st century CE. Therefore, while the Trinitarian doctrine may not be found as such in the Scriptures, Fortman assumes that they offer information about God which lends itself to believing that God is a trinity. See Edmund J. Fortman, *The Triune God: A Historical Study of the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press,1972), esp. XV and 35.

indivisible and immutable. In light of White's 'infinite risk', the Incarnation is the moment in which the divine nature becomes subjected to sin and eternal death. How is it possible, then, for God to be an immutable and indivisible trinity of persons?

Edmund J. Fortman (1901-1990) explains that "[t]here is no formal doctrine of the Trinity in the New Testament writers, if this means an explicit teaching that in one God there are three co-equal divine beings."[306] Actually, the evolution of theology brought to the declarations of the fourth century about the nature of divinity. This 'evolving theology' developed to implicitly deny every possible opinion that the divine Son of God could have placed himself at risk in a position where he could commit sin and be 'changed' by sin. From a certain perspective, this may potently obscure the grandeur of the sacrifice of Christ because the concept of sacrifice implies a potential or real loss. The idea that Christ could not sin or die because, as God, he is immutable and indivisible from the other Trinitarian persons does not fit this common concept of sacrifice. Thinking of the Son of God as someone who could never fail rather than as someone who gave everything to save humanity is not the same. Would not this also provide a different perspective of the love of God?

Fortman understands that the process that brought to the Trinitarian position of Nicaea has been progressive and not always based on the Scriptures. He writes that,

> To set forth the truths handed down to them from the Apostles they used the terminology and philosophy that were then current, and in the process they christianized Hellenism to some extent. They manifested a belief in the unity of God and in some sort of 'trinity of divinity,' even though they had as yet no distinct conception of 'divine person' and 'divine nature.'[307]

Therefore, in developing the doctrine of the Trinity, the terminology and philosophy used were borrowed from Hellenism and Christianized to some extent. An unclear belief in the unity of God as a sort of 'trinity of divinity' was conceived without distinction between 'divine person' and 'divine nature.' Therefore, the Trinity doctrine has serious implications for all theology. It shapes Christology, Soteriology and all other theological disciplines. Suppose specific Trinitarian ideas may

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[306] Fortman, *The Triune God*, 32. On p. 35, Fortman repeats again, "The Biblical witness to God, as we have seen, did not contain any formal or formulated doctrine of the trinity, any explicit teaching that in one God there are three co-equal divine persons. Rather it contained the data from which a doctrine of this kind could be formulated."

[307] Ibid., XVI.

even deny that Christ truly vacated Heaven because of his being of 'one-substance' with the Father. In that case, these approaches will surely deny that Christ could vacate Heaven for eternity if he had sinned, as White claims. This has an impact on how Christological and Soteriological concepts are developed. In fact, in most cases, the doctrine of the Trinity implies the idea that the existence of Christ must be intended in the 'one' and 'indivisible' 'immutable' substance of God. On the contrary, any teaching that does not fully adhere to the concept of 'one-substance' is not to be intended as Trinitarian in the sense of the Tri-unitarian belief, three-in-one.

This is the case with White, as the concept of an 'undivided God' is foreign to her Christology. She does not claim the idea of one God in three persons, but three persons 'as' one God. With this, she intends that all three persons of the Godhead are addressed with the term/name 'God' as they possess the same nature and purpose. She does not support a sort of polytheistic idea or henotheism where there is a pre-eminence of one god over others. She sees the relation among the three persons as indicating the unity of purpose, intent, origin and kind of three separate and distinct beings, individual, equal in nature, known as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, not consubstantial, nor originated or derived one from the other. Therefore, White does not use the term 'person' in the Trinitarian sense of 'hypostasis.' She agrees with the concept of the uniqueness of God as divine nature. Still, her theology claims that this uniqueness is revealed in three distinct persons who stand each at the side of the other in perfect harmony and equality, not sharing one substance but individually holding the same divine substance.

In fact, the permanent *aporia* of the general Trinitarian belief is that the Trinity must be accepted as a mystery of faith, something totally non-deductible and underivable.[308] Therefore, revelation does not dissolve the mysterious character of the Trinitarian belief, which exceeds the possibilities

[308] The dogma of the Trinity has been formed slowly in the history of Christianity, until it assumed its final shape. The first step toward the affirmation of the dogma of the Trinity was made at the Council of Nicaea (325 CE), where it was stated that Jesus Christ is the only Son of God, born from the same essence of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial (*homousios*) to the Father. The Council of Chalcedon (451 CE) defined the nature of Christ, against the view of Monophysites, Nestorians and others: the dual nature and the uniqueness of the person of Christ, perfect humanity and perfect deity, two natures as unconfused and unchanged, undivided and inseparable, both competing in one person and one hypostasis. Since the early centuries, there has been resistance to accept the Trinitarian dogma. Besides the followers of the Arianism, the Ebionites believed that Christ was only a great prophet, but still a man; Macedonians (followers of the Bishop Macedonio) denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit; the Adoptionists believed that Christ received his divinity only at the time of baptism, when the Holy Spirit descended upon him; Monarchians claimed the oneness of God and that Christ housed in him the divine force; the Monothelites thought that Christ had a human nature, but dominated by the divine will. To these main beliefs, others had their followers.

of human reason.[309] Thus, excluding *a priori* a belief in a plurality of gods with the sense of a hierarchical polytheism, concepts such as 'substance' (or essence) and 'hypostatic person' do not always offer a satisfactory solution. This impasse has provided the ground for theological answers generally rejected by Christianity, including White, but that are still subtly part of certain doctrinal statements. White is undoubtedly against ideas such as the human Christ was 'adopted' in the divinity (Adoptionism), or Christ was a sort of mode, emanation or expression of the Father's existence (Modalism), and the pre-Nicean thought that somehow, if Christ shares the unity of the substance in the Father, he must be subordinated to him (Subordinationism), and others.

The history of the Trinitarian belief is an inevitable consequence of the difficulties through which Christianity proceeds to fix definitions of faith and thinks of God. It results from the attempt to answer questions such as: Does God the Father and the Son have a single divine nature in common? And, more generally, how should one understand their relationship? In the great conciliar period, ranging from Nicaea to Chalcedon, the main theological formulation developed is summed up in the assertion of the unity of one divine substance in a plurality of hypostatic persons. This has been, since then, the widely accepted Trinitarian doctrine for all Christianity. However, one still wonders about what the indivisible one-substance unity of the three persons is or looks like.

Therefore, the opposite idea of three persons not participating in one substance is often seen as the claim for three Gods and consequently banned as a heretical idolatrous polytheism. One God in three coeternal and coequal persons, one substance and one undivided God, are the main accepted Trinitarian definitions. This belief, even if it does not appear so at first, constitutes the basis of the idea that it was impossible for Christ to sin and change his nature into a mortal one. Being divine means participating in one undivided, immutable God. Consequently, Christ could not ever face the risk of going out of existence. This is a major implication of the Trinity doctrine in various theological dogmas.[310]

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[309] Several questions remain, in fact, unanswered such as: How can the absolute unity of God reconcile with the real distinction of persons (single substance)? How can the equality of persons be reconciled with ideas such as the origin of the Son from the Father and of the Spirit from the Father and the Son? This is why, once challenged by these difficult questions, God becomes the unknowable in his essence and in his intimate relationships.

[310] Even the Seventh day Adventist Church declares in its official fundamental belief n.2 that: "There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal Persons," David, and Wade (eds.), *Seventh-day Adventists Believe…A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines,* 16. This is not shared by other Christian denominations within the theological tradition of Seventh day Adventism which, on the contrary, hold firmly to Ellen White's stand on the point.

A scholarly enquiry into what would have happened at the cross if Christ had sinned is unlikely. Moreover, the question of the potential death of the Son of God, intended as his ceasing to exist as a divine being, is not certainly at the centre of the Christological discussion. These relevant issues are the core reasons for this study. Moreover, most scholars do not associate these questions with the bigger picture of the Trinity doctrine and seem to underestimate the conflicting situation that may arise from a close investigation of the argument.

Suppose Trinitarian theology leads to the impossibility for Christ as the Son of God to change and be divided from the divine tri-unity, commit sin, and lose his eternal existence and divine attributes because he could not change his divine nature in any way. In that case, White may not be regarded as a 'trinitarian.' She talks openly about the risk of the Incarnation and the possibility of Christ consenting to sin and being lost even as the divine Son of God. Hence, I would contend that advocating for the orthodox perspective of a three-in-one God, with an unwavering commitment to preserving Christ's holiness and divinity, could potentially diminish or devalue the significance of his Incarnation, his becoming flesh. Paradoxically, Christ's assuming human nature with its risks is the highest expression of his divinity and perfection and the most conversion-prompting example for all sinners. The value of the Incarnation finds its greatest revelation at the cross, where God's love is shown not only in death but also in the risk taken by Christ in becoming incarnate. Following this line of reasoning, a Trinitarian view of 'oneness' of substance is against the concept of 'mutability', and even a peccable Christ does not fit into this theological picture. Once more, before analysing White's infinite risk scenario and having briefly surveyed the conceptual implications of this for the question of God's immutability and indivisibility within Trinitarian theology, I will direct my attention to White's theological view of Christ's temptability and peccability within her 'incarnational mutability' model.

3.1.4 A Temptable and Peccable Christ

Could Christ be tempted and commit sin? Was then Christ peccable? As I was advancing, these questions are also linked to the core element of the investigation, the infinite risk. If the cross could cause a separation in the Father-Son communion, which role would then play sin in the picture if Christ had committed even only one? Would there be an eternal end to that communion? Thus, the issue of Christ's im/peccability in White's theology now requires its own specific space.

When White thinks of the combination of divinity and humanity, this does not mean Christ helped his human nature with his divine one. She exclaims: "Wondrous combination of man and God!"[311] while realising that Christ could have withstood the challenges of life "by pouring from His divine nature vitality and undecaying vigor to the human."[312] But this is exactly what Christ did not do while consenting to be made flesh. I see the relevance of her affirmations, which plainly and directly address Christ as subjected to all the deficiencies of human nature. She writes that as the deceptions of Satan overpowered humanity, his hope was "that Christ also would be a victim to his seductive wiles […] We do not comprehend the infinite condescension of Christ in consenting to war with the enemy, or the infinite risk he ventured in engaging in the great controversy in our behalf."[313]

This argument presents two essential declarations. First, it points to Satan's awareness of his possibility to overcome Christ and make him commit sin. Second, it highlights the impossibility of fully comprehending Christ's 'infinite condescension' and 'infinite risk' in engaging in war with the enemy. White calls this "the mystery of the gospel"[314] spoken of since Eden. With reference to the promise of Genesis 3:15,[315] where Satan is depicted as a serpent who tries to bite Christ (the head), White says that "if Satan could have touched the head with his specious temptations, the human family would have been lost."[316] It becomes clear to me that for White, the destiny of humankind was certain: eternal loss. In certain aspects, this language is not far from the one of Gustaf Aulén's

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[311] "Christ Man's Example," RH 5 July 1887, para. 6.

[312] Ibid.

[313] "The Purpose and Plan of Grace," ST 25 April 1892, para. 8. I would like to observe again here, as a previous note has already stated, that 'Christ' consistently refers to his incarnated person, divine and human. In this sense, the expression 'infinite condescension' is set in parallel with 'infinite risk' and points to a specific 'Trinitarian' view. I do not enter here into Trinity doctrine, but for the sake of this work, White's understanding is that Father and Son possess the 'same' (type) substance but not a numerically 'one' substance. Terms such as 'consubstantial', '*homoousios*', 'coessential', and many more, are never used in her writings with regard to the ontological status of the three persons of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, nor such terms are intended in their Trinitarian meaning even if expressed with other ones. She never intends the three persons as *hypostases* of God. White holds the opinion that the three persons are one in the same sense in which a husband is one with his wife, that is to say they do not share a single and common essence but the same kind of substance as a man and a woman are both 'human' (or with a Scriptural reference: In John 17 believers should be one as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one, but this does not refer to 'one' substance). For White, surely the three persons are not part of a 'single unit', but they share fully the same attributes and distinct identity mirrored in the level of human existence.

[314] Ibid., para. 9.

[315] "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel."

[316] "The Purpose and Plan of Grace," ST 25 April 1892, para. 9.

(1879-1977) book *Christus Victor*[317] (and from his type of atonement theory) or of Irenaeus and Luther.[318] As it may be seen again, White's Christological arguments are always set in a soteriological frame, and she sees it essential to consider that in the work of salvation, "the issues at stake were beyond the comprehension of man."[319]

In 1890, in reference to Christ, White writes that he "was tempted as man is tempted. He was capable of yielding to temptations, as are human beings."[320] She affirms that temptations acted on Christ as on all human beings. In this sense, she equates the human nature of Christ to that of any other human. This may not appear different from those models of the Incarnation which try to show how Christ's humanity was truly tempted. However, White is clear that temptation was something Christ could yield to. Following the same reasoning, very importantly, she adds that "The divine nature, combined with the human, made Him capable of yielding to Satan's temptations. Here the test to Christ was far greater than that of Adam and Eve, for Christ took our nature, fallen but not corrupted, and would not be corrupted unless He received the words of Satan in the place of the words of God."[321] The reference to Adam and Eve is not to their unfallen state as if White was claiming a pre-lapsarian condition of Christ at the Incarnation. This appears clear from various other statements in this analysis. Christ took a post-lapsarian nature, or as White calls it a "fallen nature," and could have kept a sinless life only by a faithful life.[322] Consequently, the opposite is also true, it

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[317] Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement* (London: SPCK, 1931)

[318] According to Aulén, there is a type of atonement doctrine which presents Christ as the overcomer of the enemy powers that hold humanity in subjection. In a nutshell, Aulén considers this view predominant in the New Testament, Patristics, and the theology of Luther. This view has its centre in the continuous divine action. The power of sin, death, and the devil are overcome and the Father reconciles the world to Himself through the Son. God's triumph over these powers is dramatic and dualistic assuming a conflict between God and evil, sin, and death. However, this view is also objective as it shows God taking the initiative of changing his relationship with the world.

[319] "The Purpose and Plan of Grace," ST 25 April 1892, para. 6.

[320] "Christ's Humiliation," Ms 57, np. 1890, para. 9.

[321] Ibid., para. 11.

[322] White writes in an article about the temptation of Christ that "In taking upon Himself man's nature in its fallen condition, Christ did not in the least participate in its sin. He was subject to the infirmities and weaknesses by which man is encompassed, 'that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.' He was touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and was in all points tempted like as we are. And yet He 'knew no sin.' He was the lamb 'without blemish and without spot.' Could Satan in the least particular have tempted Christ to sin, he would have bruised the Saviour's head. As it was, he could only touch His heel. Had the head of Christ been touched, the hope of the human race would have perished. Divine wrath would have come upon Christ as it came upon Adam. Christ and the church would have been without hope. We should have no misgivings in regard to the perfect sinlessness of the human nature of Christ," in "Tempted in All Points Like as We Are," ST 9 June 1898, paras 14-15.

would have been perfectly possible for Christ to corrupt himself if he had accepted the snares of Satan. Therefore, the only hope for Christ lies in avoiding corruption through perfect obedience. This challenges the most orthodox Trinitarian views which cannot accept the concept that Christ could cease to be (if corrupted by sin) because he is integral to the 'structure' of the Trinitarian God.

White's comments reinforce the idea that to be the perfect sacrifice, Christ had to be a perfect example for human beings: "To suppose He was not capable of yielding to temptation places Him where He cannot be a perfect example for man, and the force and the power of this part of Christ's humiliation, which is the most eventful, is no instruction or help to human beings."[323] Christ had to be a perfect human being and perfectly 'temptable' in a way identical to every human being. In fact, in the same year, White writes an article in the Adventist magazine *Review and Herald*, in which she says that Christ was tempted constantly.[324]

In his booklet titled *The impeccability of Christ,* which offers a rare critique of White's Christology,[325] John W. McCormick (1922-1995) states that White "[…] in her book The Desire Of Ages, actually teaches that the entire earthly ministry of Christ was marked by a constant struggle on His part to avoid sinning. Moreover, she teaches that His refusal to commit sin was due to the enabling grace of God, rather than to the Impeccability of His Person."[326] Although McCormick's comment on White and Adventism is framed in a polemic context, his brief remark shows an understanding of White's different Christology. However, certain clarifications must be made regarding the question of *kenosis* and enabling grace in White's writings.

Once questioned about the combined divine-human person of the Son of God incarnate, White answered:

> Letters have been coming into me, affirming that Christ could not have had the same nature as man, for if he had, he would have fallen under similar temptations. […] If he did not have man's nature, he could not be our example. If he was not a partaker of our nature, he could not have been tempted as man has been. If it were not possible for him to yield to temptation,

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[323] "Christ's Humiliation," Ms 57, np. 1890 para. 11.

[324] "The Son of God was assaulted at every step by the powers of darkness. After his baptism he was driven of the Spirit into the wilderness, and suffered temptation for forty days," in "How to Meet a Controverted Point of Doctrine," RH 18 February 1890, para. 6.

[325] As previously said, Aamodt, Land, and Numbers affirm that White is rarely mentioned outside Adventism. See *Ellen Harmon White: American Prophet,* 334.

[326] John W. McCormick, *The Impeccability of Christ* (Shelby, NC: Fundamental Baptist Institute, 1970, reprinted 2002), 1.

he could not be our helper. It was a solemn reality that Christ came to fight the battles as man, in man's behalf. His temptation and victory tell us that humanity must copy the Pattern; man must become a partaker of the divine nature.[327]

The salvation of humankind rests precisely on the question of Christ being a perfect example in all. This is what While calls a "solemn reality." The sacrifice might not have a sense if an impeccable Christ had an 'extra advantage.' If Christ could not yield to temptation, he could not be the Saviour. The letters that White received reveal the difficulty in accepting the concept of a peccable Christ in White's times. This is remarked by another article that appeared one year earlier in the magazine *Signs of the Times*, an official publication presenting the stands and views of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, penned by the Adventist theologian Ellet J. Waggoner:

How was it that Christ could be thus "compassed with infirmity" (Heb. 5:2), and still know no sin? […] Some may have thought, while reading this article thus far, that we were depreciating the character of Jesus, by bringing him down to the level of sinful man. On the contrary, we are simply exalting the 'divine power' of our blessed Saviour, who himself voluntarily descended to the level of sinful man, in order that he might exalt man to his own spotless purity, which he retained under the most adverse circumstances. 'God was in Christ,' and hence he could not sin.[328]

According to Waggoner, Christ could not sin, and his spotless purity was maintained in the Incarnation. He follows, explaining that humanity only veiled the divine nature, which "never for a moment harbored an evil desire, nor did his divine power for a moment waver. […] it had been impossible for the divine nature which dwelt in him to sin."[329] Even if Christ suffered in the flesh, he had been spotless in all the total sense of it. The idea of Waggoner raises some contrasts if compared to that of White. He even argues, in a hypothetical dialogue, that some could say:

'I don't see any comfort in this for me; it wasn't possible that the Son of God should sin, but I haven't any such power.' Why not? You can have it if you want it. The same power which enabled him to resist every temptation presented through the flesh, while he was 'compassed

[327] "How to Meet a Controverted Point of Doctrine," RH 18 February 1890, para. 6.

[328] Ellet J. Waggoner, "God manifest in the flesh," ST 21 January 1889, para. 11.

[329] Ibid.; see also Waggoner, *Christ and His Righteousness*, 28, "His humanity only veiled His Divine nature, by which He was inseparably connected with the invisible God and which was more than able successfully to resist the weaknesses of the flesh."

with infirmity,' can enable us to do the same. Christ could not sin, because he was the manifestation of God.[330]

For Waggoner, the question of Christ as a perfect example, dear to White, does not play any role because, differently from her, his Christology is not rooted in Soteriology. He tends toward the concept that Christ could not be separated from the Father; hence, he could not cease to be and could not sin. In his view, Christ could not sin because of his role, that of being God's manifestation. A believer, instead, can simply receive the same strength to resist sin. Therefore, the theological focus of the question is moved from Christ as an example to Christ as a power-giver.

White totally disagrees with this view. Only a few years after Waggoner's opinion, in 1892, she reinforces her concept by penning these words in an apologetic style: "Those who claim that it was not possible for Christ to sin, cannot believe that He took upon Him human nature. […] Christ was actually tempted, not only in the wilderness but all through his life. In all points He was tempted as we are, and because He successfully resisted temptation in every form, He gave us a perfect example."[331] She seems sure that Christ became the perfect example in all things. This means more than the idea of someone enabling human beings to overcome sin through a specific power. I can certainly remark on her constantly coherent Christology throughout her extensive writing career, expressed with clarity of arguments and framed within a soteriological understanding of the Incarnation.

In 1893, only three years after Waggoner's book *Christ in His Righteousness*, White presents a reflection specifically titled *Could Christ Have Yielded to Temptation?* in which she answers this crucial question "was He capable, in His human nature, of yielding to these temptations? I will try to answer this important question: As God He could not be tempted: but as a man He could be tempted, and that strongly, and could yield to the temptations. His human nature must pass through the same test and trial Adam and Eve passed through."[332] Once more, her concept of Christ's peccability is precise and always based on the fundamental soteriological concept of Christ as a

[330] Waggoner, "God manifest in the flesh," para. 12.

[331] "'Tempted in All Points Like as We Are," in BE 1 November 1892, para. 7.

[332] "Could Christ Have Yielded to Temptation?," Ms 94, 30 June 1893, paras 1-3 (also in 6MR 112.2).

perfect example and substitute for humankind. Christ could then yield to temptation, and his human nature was in a state where the test and trial of life were identical to those of any human being.[333]

White, wanting to clarify that Christ was not tempted exactly as Adam, assuming instead a post-lapsarian nature, says that Adam faced temptation in a different way as he "stood in the strength of his perfection before God."[334] This was somehow facilitated by the fact that he was surrounded with "everything his heart could wish. Every want was supplied. There was no sin, and no signs of decay in glorious Eden.[…] He was in the image of God, but a little lower than the angels."[335] Christ, instead, as the second Adam, was in striking contrast to the first Adam in his perfect status.[336] According to White,

> For four thousand years the race had been decreasing in size and physical strength, and deteriorating in moral worth; and in order to elevate fallen man, Christ must reach him where he stood. He assumed human nature, bearing the infirmities and degeneracy of the race. He humiliated himself to the lowest depths of human woe, that he might sympathize with man and rescue him from the degradation into which sin had plunged him.[337]

The expression "where he stood" defines Christ's Incarnation as the process of assuming the sinful condition of humanity with its infirmities and degenerated state. Linking her argument to some biblical quotations (Heb. 2:10, 5:9, 2:17-18; 4:15)[338] on Christ assuming human nature, she

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[333] White further highlights: "Let us consider how much it cost our Saviour in the wilderness of temptation to carry on in our behalf the conflict with the wily, malignant foe. Satan knew that everything depended upon his success or failure in his attempt to overcome Christ with his manifold temptations. Satan knew that the plan of salvation would be carried out to its fulfillment, that his power would be taken away, that his destruction would be certain, if Christ bore the test that Adam failed to endure. The temptations of Satan were most effective in degrading human nature, for man could not stand against their powerful influence; but Christ in man's behalf, as man's representative, resting wholly upon the power of God, endured the severe conflict, in order that He might be a perfect example to us," in "Conquer Through the Conqueror," RH 5 February 1895, para. 4.

[334] "The Temptation of Christ," RH 28 July 1874, para. 2.

[335] Ibid., para. 4.

[336] "What a contrast to this perfect being did the second Adam present, as he entered the desolate wilderness to cope with Satan," in "Extracts from 'Life of Christ,'" in *General Conference Bulletin* 25 February 1895.

[337] Ibid.

[338] "For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings," in "The Temptation of Christ," RH 28 July 1874, para. 6; "And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him," Ibid, para. 7; "Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted," Ibid., para. 8; "For we have not a High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin," Ibid., para. 9

remarks on the perfect sacrifice of Christ by saying that he "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."[339] She resists explanations that could indicate the nature of Christ as different from that of any human being. In this sense, she writes against a *non-posse peccare* position: "Many hold that from the nature of Christ it was impossible for Satan's temptations to weaken or overthrow him. Then Christ could not have been placed in Adam's position, to go over the ground where Adam stumbled and fell; he could not have gained the victory that Adam failed to gain."[340]

It appears evident that by mentioning "the ground where Adam stumbled and fell" as to where Christ stepped over, White refers to the fallen nature of humankind subjected to temptations. She continues by saying,

> If man has in any sense a more trying conflict to endure than had Christ, then Christ is not able to succor him when tempted. Christ took humanity with all its liabilities. He took the nature of man with the possibility of yielding to temptation and with the same aid that men may obtain, he withstood the temptations of Satan and conquered the same as we may conquer […] He assumed human nature, bearing the infirmities and degeneracy of the race. […] It is not true that humanity has trials to bear which the Son of God has not experienced.[341]

In plain words, Christ assumed a human nature subjected to the possibility of yielding to temptation in a post-lapsarian context. In this vein, White remarks upon the nature of Christ as identical to that of every human being and subject to the degeneracy of the race.[342] Paradoxically, if, according to the Scripture (1 John 2), a believer may rely today on Christ as an advocate and expiation for sin, if Christ had sinned, he would not have had anyone to expiate his sins. In other words, if Christ had sinned he would have been lost. Therefore, he had no advantage over human beings but all risk. Using a metaphor, he was like an equilibrist on a rope without a safety net; the doctrine of impeccability would instead constitute that safety net. This is remarkably highlighted by

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[339] Ibid., para. 9.

[340] "Extract from 'Temptations of Christ,'" in *General Conference Bulletin*, 5 February 1893.

[341] Ibid.

[342] White writes also that "We know that in our own strength it is not possible for us to succeed; but as Christ humbled Himself, and took upon Himself our nature, He is acquainted with our necessities, and has Himself borne the heaviest temptations that man will have to bear, has conquered the enemy in resisting his suggestions, in order that man may learn how to be conqueror. He was clothed with a body like ours, and in every respect suffered what man will suffer, and very much more," in "Conquer Through the Conqueror," RH 5 February 1895, para. 6.

the following statement, where the validity of Christ's sacrifice is exactly based on the possibility of failing as a free agent placed on probation,

> Christ bore the sins of the whole world. He endured our punishment, -- the wrath of God against transgression. His trial involved the fierce temptation of thinking that he was forsaken by God. His soul was tortured by the pressure of a horror of great darkness lest he should swerve from his uprightness during the terrible ordeal. He could not have been tempted in all points like as man is tempted had there been no possibility of his failing. He was a free agent, placed on probation, as was Adam and as is man.[343]

White emphasizes the considerable pressure of the sins of the world on Christ. His experience is here defined with words such as 'trial,' 'punishment,' and 'terrible ordeal.' The possibility of being forsaken by God tortured Christ with a 'horror of great darkness.' The risk of failing and being abandoned to the consequences of sin was real. Christ could have swerved from his uprightness because of temptation. His life on earth was on probation because "unless there is a possibility of yielding, temptation is no temptation."[344]

Even within the exegetical frame of Philippians 2:7[345] and the self-emptying of Christ in becoming human, not many would agree with considering the self-relinquishing of Christ's divine attributes as to refer to a sort of 'subjection' of the divine nature to the human one. As Friedrich Loofs (1858-1928) notes: "The truth is that no theologian of any standing in the early church ever adopted such a theory of the *kenosis* of the Logos as would involve an actual supersession of His divine form of existence by the human – a real 'becoming-man', i.e. a transformation on the part of the Logos."[346] It seems, instead, that for White, the Son of God could really cross the metaphysical division between divine and human and create a bridge providing salvation to the fallen race at the risk of his divine existence.

Finally, White describes temptation as a powerful influence to do a wrong action with the full awareness and consciousness of the possibility of doing it. She openly claims that this is "the ordeal

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[343] "Sacrificed for Us," Ms 29, 17 March 1899, paras 4-5; see also YI 20 July 1899.

[344] Ibid.

[345] "but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness."

[346] Friedrich Loofs, s.v. 'Kenosis', in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (vol. 7; ed. J. Hastings; Edinburg: T&T Clark, 1908-1921), 680-687 (683). See also Thomas Thompson, "Nineteenth-Century Kenotic Christology: The Waxing, Waning, and Weighing of a Quest for a Coherent Orthodoxy," in Evans (ed.) *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God*, 74-111; see also John Polkinghorne (ed.), *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis* (London: SPCK, 2001).

through which Christ passed."[347] In his last hours on the cross, Christ realized "the terrible consequence of the transgression of God's law."[348] In White's words, a matchless ransom has been paid for saving men and "all heaven has been given in one gift."[349] As a free agent, he voluntarily and freely chooses not to sin.

White's depiction of Christ as peccable (able to sin) implies that he took the risk of failure and eternal loss. This does not blur White's clear understanding of the Son of God as a pre-existing and eternal divine being. She writes that Christ is the divine Son of God who "existed from eternity, a distinct person, yet one with the Father."[350] However, it was only through "the gift of his Son, equal with himself, possessing the attributes of God"[351] that the fallen race could be restored. Christ consented to assume human nature to reconcile it to God. Christ became humanity's substitute. Christ had to live a life of constant fight against temptations, but, at the same time, he delighted in living and doing the will of his Father. Paradoxically, Christ must have regarded this as a privilege instead of a struggle. He states openly (John 17) that he came to glorify the Father and that it was a delight for him to keep God's law. Although his life has been one of sorrows and continuous attacks from Satan, on the shadow of the risk of failure, he lived this earthly life in the fullness of its sense and took pleasure in holiness and righteousness. The Gospel depicts a Christ able to love and sympathize with humankind and fully embrace the joys and pains of life. This picture is what White tries her best to portray. Therefore, how can one appreciate the unfathomable depth of God's love and self-sacrifice without grasping the risk entailed in the redemption of humankind?

3.1.5 Infinite Risk and Peccability

White thinks that God's love may truly be appreciated only when one realizes the risk involved in the redemption of humankind. A peccable Son of God who could lose his very existence and therefore be subjected to an inevitable change is, however, an impossibility in those Trinitarian

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[347] "Sacrificed for Us," Ms 29, 17 March 1899, paras 4-5; see also YI 20 July 1899. The statement is introduced by the following words: "Temptation comes and is resisted when man is powerfully influenced to do a wrong action, and knowing that he can do it, resists by faith, with a firm hold upon divine power."

[348] Ibid.

[349] Ibid.

[350] "The Word Made Flesh," RH 5 April 1906, para. 7.

[351] "Imperative Necessity of Searching for Truth," RH 8 November 1892 para. 3.

views where God is believed to possess a single indivisible substance, and Christ is seen as unable to sin. As William Shedd (1820-1894) reports, the sinlessness of Christ was and is "generally acknowledged,"[352] and there is a widespread *consensus* that Christ did not sin and could not sin.[353] Oliver D. Crisp confirms this theological concept by saying that "it has been the almost unanimous view of classical Christology that Christ was not merely without sin, though he might have sinned, but that he was incapable of sin."[354] Crisp clarifies that the positions expressed by the scholastic terms of *posse peccare* (being able to sin) and *non posse peccare* (unable to sin) may be regarded as the *sinlessness view* (able to sin but not sin) and the *impeccability view* (unable to sin). Therefore, as Crisp puts it, "According to the sinlessness view, Christ was able to sin but did not sin; on the impeccability view Christ was not able to sin."[355] As previously said, this last concept has dominated Christological debates. However, a number of scholars in recent years prefer to stay on more neutral ground, away from the impeccability view, and claim the mere sinlessness status of Christ.[356]

In this train of thought, a valuable argument comes from Millard J. Erickson. He argues that the intercessory role of Christ, as portrayed in the Letter to the Hebrews, is possible only if he identifies with humanity. In this way, in the words of Erickson, Christ experienced in his temptations "not only the whole range of sin, but the real possibility of sinning."[357] Therefore, it seems safe for some, at least theologically, to assume that Christ could possibly sin but did not. The nineteenth-century theologian Charles Hodge (1797-1878) endorses this same theological approach on a similar ground: Christ's mediatory office. He writes that there is a need for a sinless mediator between God and humanity; therefore, "a sinful Saviour from sin is an impossibility."[358] In Hodge's words, this need is due to the fact that only a sinless Christ can have access to the Father and be the sacrifice for sin and the source of holiness and eternal life. Therefore, he claims that having a sinful Saviour is an 'impossibility'. However, what he means by this argument is that the Saviour is sinless and not

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[352] William Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (vol. 2; 1889; repr., Minneapolis: Klock & Klock Christian Publishers, 1979), 330.

[353] See also Canham, "Potuit Non Peccare or Non Potuit Peccare: Evangelicals, Hermeneutics, and the Impeccability Debate," 93.

[354] Crisp, "Was Christ Sinless or Impeccable?", 168; see also a broader study on this topic in Oliver D. Crisp, *God Incarnate: Explorations in Christology* (London: T&T Clark, 2009).

[355] Ibid., 168.

[356] See also 2.2.1 and 2.2.2 for further studies on the question of impeccability.

[357] Millard J. Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh: A Contemporary Incarnational Christology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1991), 562.

[358] Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 457. See also Cassidy, "No 'Absolute Impeccability:' Charles Hodge and Christology at Old and New Princeton."

impeccable. His words confirm this,

> This sinlessness of our Lord, however, does not amount to absolute impeccability. It was not a *non potest peccare*. If He was a true man He must have been capable of sinning. […] Temptation implies the possibility of sin. If from the constitution of his person it was impossible for Christ to sin, then his temptation was unreal and without effect, and He cannot sympathize with his people.[359]

Hodge holds a non-impeccability position, which could resound in White's Christology. He certainly claims for a Christ "capable of sinning" on the ground that this could have been the only way to be "a true man." Therefore, wherever there is temptation, there should also be the possibility of sin. The opposite would be a farce. Interestingly, Hodge talks about this on both ontological and soteriological grounds when he argues that "from the constitution of his person it was impossible for Christ to sin" and that Christ's resistance to temptations would be "without effect" if they were not real; thus he could not have sympathized with humanity. Hodge and many others do not consider the possibility of sinning much more than just theological reasoning. There is a cautious approach to what that possibility of sinning could imply for Christ as the Son of God and, more broadly, for concepts such as the Trinity and divinity.[360]

This difficulty may be seen in the work of American Baptist theologian Erickson. He truly thinks that Christ could sin, but somehow, he is unclear about the meaning of this possibility when he claims that Christ would not have sinned. [361] It is like saying that Christ did not sin, even if he could, because he would not.[362] This reasoning catches the problem of those who try to stay on neutral ground, away from the impeccability view from one side and from what White would argue as 'infinite risk' from the other. Erickson writes that "there are conditions under which he [Christ] could have sinned, but that it was certain those conditions would not be fulfilled. Thus Jesus really could

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[359] Ibid.

[360] Canham claims that even the Scriptures do not provide information to answer the question of Christ's peccability, "Potuit Non peccare or Non Potuit Peccare", 94, 97; for further study on the question of the biblical and theological ground for Christ's sinlessness, see Gerald O'Collins, *Christology: A Biblical, Historical and Systematic Study of Jesus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 268–271. See also Brian O. McDermott, *Word become flesh: Dimensions of Christology* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993). For further detailed study about the New Testament witness to the doctrine of the Incarnation, see also James Dunn, *Christology in the Making: An Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (2nd ed.; London: SCM, 1989).

[361] Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh,* 562-563.

[362] See also Paul Thomas, *The Second Man: The Lord from Heaven* (Leicester: Anchor Print Group Ltd ,2011), esp. 148-156.

have decided to cast himself from the temple pinnacle, but it was certain that he would not."[363] So, the picture is blurred by the expression "there are conditions" followed by the fact that these conditions would not be fulfilled. Consequently, Christ could have decided to sin but "it was certain that he would not." I may not find it a very axiomatic argument. However, the scenario proposed by Erickson and, more broadly, the theological view of sinlessness do not dare to explore the resulting theological implications of the "possibility of sinning."[364]

I agree with Crisp that depicting Christ as sinless and not impeccable rests on the assumption that one or the other position may emphasise human or divine nature. As Crisp writes, the sinlessness view seems to stem "from a laudable desire to affirm the full humanity of Christ."[365] However, as I have argued above, theologians advocating for the sinlessness view do not wish to explore the implications of this position. In the words of Crisp, obviously, this concept "requires a much more radical revision of the doctrine of God as well as of classical Christology than such theologians may be willing to allow."[366]

The opposite may also be true for those advocating for the impeccability view who, therefore, implicitly affirm the full divinity of Christ and run the risk of taking humanity out of the Christological picture. Indeed, the traditional view that Christ was impeccable still finds more extensive agreement, while the sinlessness view remains, instead, undeveloped. This is where White's theology may make the difference by challenging the impeccability view and re-exploring the classical Christological positions and the doctrine of God by offering a landing ground for the sinlessness view.

However, some may look for a solution by advancing another impeccability hypothesis. What if Christ was able to sin only in his human nature and not in his divine? William L. Banks (1928-2020) calls this attempt "modern day nestorianism,"[367] while Michael McGhee Canham, instead, supports the idea that the *kenosis* of Christ "makes it possible for Him to be both impeccable and peccable,

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[363] Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh,* 562-563.

[364] For another contribution in the debate around the question of sinlessness, see Trevor Hart, 'Sinlessness and Moral Responsibility: A Problem in Christology,' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 48/1 (1995):37-54 (esp.38). Hart also discusses the traditional understanding that Christ was tempted but without sin. While examining the claim of Hebrews 4:15, "tempted in all respects as we are, yet without sin", Hart approaches the verse from a dogmatic perspective identifying A) a weaker one simply stating that Christ did not commit any sin, thus resembling a *posse non peccare* view, and a B) a stronger one claiming that Christ was incapable of committing sin, a *non posse peccare* view.

[365] Crisp, "Was Christ Sinless or Impeccable?", 170.

[366] Ibid.

[367] William L. Banks, *The Day Satan Met Jesus* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1974), 46.

and that, while He always possessed both capabilities in His incarnation, the exercise of his human attribute of peccability apparently limited the exercise of His divine attribute of impeccability."[368] According to Canham there has always been a general problem in assuming that Christ was whether exclusively peccable or impeccable. He argues that "a 'both/and' explanation fits the data better."[369]

First, I highlight once more that a first problem of these theological attempts, such as that of Canham, is that they try to find a sort of balance between humanity and divinity, though lacking almost always a fully developed argument about the implication of whether one or another position. Second, they always end up avoiding ever considering a divine peccable Christ, that is, a Christ that, though being divine, could still sin and pay its consequence with eternal death. In this line of thought, I agree with Charles Feinberg (1909-1995) that the option that Christ could sin would "call for a radical revolution in our conception of the Godhead."[370] This is exactly what White's infinite risk theology would prompt. Nonetheless, it may appear an easy task to accept that somehow humanity did have an influence on divinity, as Christ felt emotions, suffering, etc. Conversely, taking the words of Canham, it becomes difficult to understand how "the exercise of his human attribute of peccability apparently limited the exercise of His divine attribute of impeccability." While it is relatively simple to accept that Christ felt hunger and thirst, it is not the same as admitting that he could morally act against God's Law by transgressing it and then literally committing sin.

In his *Systematic Theology*, this is how to understand Wayne Grudem, when he writes that there is one person in Christ, however, "whose human nature never existed apart from union with his divine nature."[371] This confirms the intention of every Christology, that of elaborating a doctrine that may not include any potential contradiction as to the divine-human nature of Christ. The question is often that of understanding to what extent one may say that the Incarnation involved assuming human limitations or in which way humanity calls into question the divine attributes of impeccability, immutability, holiness, and omnipotence, amongst many others. In this space, all Christological options raise several questions, often without satisfactory answers. Therefore, the subject remains complex and, in any case, may turn out to be, at the same time, both relevant and somehow tangential to the question of infinite risk, or it may reduce the relevance of the specific

[368] See Canham, "Potuit Non Peccare or Non Potuit Peccare," 96-97, see also 96-100.
[369] Ibid., 97.
[370] Charles Feinberg, "The Hypostatic Union," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 92, no. 368. (Oct-Dec 1935), 423.
[371] Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction To Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 538-539.

study of what could have happened if Christ had sinned. However, who would be comfortable taking a step further and believing that the Son of God, entering history, time and space, could be 'trapped' in it and die forever? This theological question needs here further analysis.

3.2 Remarks on the Theological Question and its Challenges

As it has been clarified, when White talks of Christ, meaning the incarnated Son of God, both divine and human, she thinks of a self-existing being equal to the Father, though separated and independent from him. Divine and human nature coexist fully, as White has stated, though somewhat humanity veiled divinity, which, on its part, did not constitute an advantage in overcoming sin but the *conditio sine qua non,* i.e. the connection with the Father. According to White, divinity needed humanity as a channel of communication between God and man, and humanity needed divinity so that a power from above might restore humanity to the likeness of God. However, this interdependence between the natures and their reciprocal need constitutes the basis for arguing that if Christ could commit sin, as temptation was fully authentic, then the united person of Christ would have paid its consequences. According to Hebrews 4:15[372] and 2:18[373] Christ has been tempted as every human being is. This may then imply the possibility to give in to temptation and at the same time challenge the divine attributes of immutability and indivisibility.

If there was no option to choose sin, then there was no temptation either. Contrary to Hebrews, Christ could not have been 'tested' as we are. Sure, one could ask, how can God be tested? How can he suffer? And, most of all, can he still be God if he is tempted and suffers? Discussing the question of divine passion, or pain, also has serious implications for Trinitarian and Christological doctrines. Paul Fiddes, critically dialoguing with theopaschites theologians, analyses the conceptual frame in which a suffering God can still accomplish his purposes. Aware of the complexity of the matter, he advances the idea that if divine suffering is anything like human suffering, i.e. suffering recognisably like that of human beings, this may not leave God unchanged.[374] Divine immutability requires a radical change.

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[372] "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin."

[373] "Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested."

[374] See Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God,* 261-262.

The question becomes, therefore, even more complex when one thinks of the divine nature as an eternal one which cannot cease to exist nor change, and of the Son of God as immutably and indivisibly bound to his nature and to the triune God's dimension of existence. The mystery becomes even denser if one considers God's essence as wholly holy and love. God is not able to do something sinful because that would contradict his perfect essence. How can God make himself non-existent? Or how can he prevent himself from being eternal? This would mean God cannot act contradictorily.

Following this logic is when the problem arises. One is then prompted to believe that the Incarnation does not entail the possibility of sinning and that temptation does not presuppose the option of giving in to it. This becomes an 'epistemological' circle, making the biblical claim that Jesus was tempted as every human being a falsity as he did not enter temptation in the shadow of the risk of falling. The same would be true for his death on the cross, which would only be a risk-less moment of suffering. He would endure it, but without the consequence that sin could cause, i.e. eternal death and separation from God.

Following White's reasoning, free will and free choice are at the basis of the peccability of Christ, of his ability to sin. He could freely choose; therefore, he accepted the risk of that choice, which is the same risk every human being faces when tempted. Sin produces death, and Christ accepted sin in its full sense, not in a different one or adapted to his divine nature. It is through his human nature, however, joined to the divine, that he overcame. Therefore, his human nature would dictate the destiny of his divine one. Christ's free choice means he possessed a will and freedom of thought and action. Therefore, for White, it would be very logical to believe that such freedom is fictitious in the absence of a real possibility of committing sin. It would not be 'true' freedom if it were not threatened by the 'imprisonment' of sin. In this sense, believing that Christ could sin is the logical consequence of the freedom to choose a life perfectly identical to the human one.

Some may believe this could reduce or limit the quality of the transcendent God. However, the mysterious, both transcendent and immanent, nature of the incarnated Son of God is, instead, expanded beyond human comprehension. A 'peccable' and 'mutable' Christ is not the expression of a reduced or determined divinity but the expansion of it in that capacity of the divine to assume human nature. To have a choice means to be able to discern and avoid what you could possibly choose though aware of its clear consequences, i.e. sin. To say that the Son of God could only choose good and not evil makes the choice a no-choice. This may challenge the general idea that hypostatic union means no change in the equation of the two natures (divine and human) of Christ.

White's view aims to say that the Incarnation affects indeed both natures. Human nature is offered the strengths of the divine one, while divine nature assumes the weaknesses of the human one. This is true within the boundary of Christ's Incarnation. The Incarnation makes the situation different and unique for the divinity at the level of humanity in the person of Christ. Certainly, Christ was fully divine and fully human as the Son of God on earth; however, it is precisely the Incarnation that places the divine in front of the choices of the human. Claiming that Christ could not sin may mean excluding human nature from the act of the Incarnation. Claiming that he could not be separated from the Father or that the divine attribute of immutability prevented him from a potential death may mean excluding divine nature from the act of the Incarnation.

It is the Incarnation that changes the perspective. God's essence is indeed holiness and perfection; it is the opposite for human nature. Therefore, how is it possible to have a holy essence in an unholy one? The essence of a human being after Adam is sinful, and this post-lapsarian nature is the one White repeatedly claims Christ took on himself. Through his connection with the Father, he could endure temptation and overcome the desires of human nature. The Bible is clear to attest that Jesus never committed a sin.[375] Therefore, contrary to what is supported by many and according to White, Christ was not tempted only from without but also from within, from his human nature. The opposite would require the complete annihilation of human nature. In which sense then, would one need to understand that both natures, divine and human, could co-exist, if not by mutual influence?[376]

Ludwig Ott (1906-1985) says that Christ could not sin due to the hypostatic union and that "his human actions are actions of a Divine Person. […] From the Hypostatic Union there arises a physical impossibility of sinning and from the Beatific Vision a moral impossibility."[377] In this same direction is John A. Hardon (1914-2000), stating the "absolute impossibility of Christ committing any sin."[378] In many Christian traditions, this is regarded as a divine revelation, a sort of *sententia fidei proxima.* The Second Council of Constantinople (CE 553) condemned the position attributed to Theodore of Mopsuestia for his assertion that Christ became completely impeccable only after the resurrection.

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[375] See Jn 8:46; Heb 7:2-28; 9:14; 1 Pt 1:19; 2:22; 1 Jn 3:5.

[376] See also Fernand Prat, *The Theology of St. Paul* (vol. 2; Westminster, MD: Newman Bookshop, 1952), 205.

[377] Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* (trans. Patrick Lynch; ed. J. Canon Bastible: Rockford, IL: TAN Books and Publishers, Inc.; fourth edition, 1960), 169.

[378] John A. Hardon, "Impeccability of Christ," in *Modern Catholic Dictionary* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1980) 269.

In reference to the possibility for Christ to become "prey to inordinate desires and temptations, Theodore argues that Satan strove to tempt Christ because he regarded him as a human being."[379] Theodore writes that Christ "was according to the flesh both hungry and tempted,"[380] thus implying that his human nature was subjected to temptations.

Believing that Christ was ontologically incapable of sinning, every temptation – whether from within or without – would not be real. This will have the consequence of creating a difference between Christ and human beings in that he would have been tempted in a different way. On the contrary, if yielding to temptation and committing sin were ontologically possible, even if logically complex due to the perfect conformance of the human nature to the divine one, then Christ could truly be the point of reference and example for humanity.

The Bible presents the temptations as authentic, especially in the Gospel's context of the forty days spent in the desert. If Christ could not sin, then in what sense was he tempted? If he was God in his divine nature, it seems impossible to conceive a God able to sin. But, this does not make straight the consequent declaration that Christ, being God, could not sin. The question of the hypostatic union of the two natures, human and divine, calls into discussion the im/peccability and im/mutability of Christ because he was not only divine but also human. While divine nature is impeccable and immutable, human nature is peccable and mutable. One can say that nature by itself cannot sin, while the person does. But, even in this case, the Incarnation joins the divine and the human persons in one. The joined divine-human incarnated Son of God is the one that White says has been tempted like one of us, and not only the divine person.

The crux of all problems is probably the effort to distinguish the natures in the process of the Incarnation as if they were still wholly independent and somehow with the divine nature overruling the human. Often, it is believed that the divine nature elevates the human by the grace of the hypostatic union. In contrast, the opposite scenario is not considered. What if human nature 'lowered' the divine one to the level of being subjected to the consequences of human nature's sin? Consequently, if sin may be considered a 'deficiency,' a tendency towards non-existence, committing sin inevitably brings death. If the Son of God had possibly sinned at any time during his

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[379] Frederick G. McLeod, *The Roles of Christ's Humanity in Salvation: Insights from Theodore of Mopsuestia* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 244.

[380] Augusto Guida, *Replica a Giuliano Imperatore: adversus criminationes in Christianos Iuliani imperatoris* (Biblioteca Patristica 24; Florence: Nardini Centro Internazionale del Libro, 1994), 80.

life, then he could have potentially paid the consequences of it. Therefore, he could have died because sin is a movement towards non-existence/non-being. This is where White's infinite risk comes into the picture, and she describes it as the "whole treasure of heaven,"

> But He humbled Himself, and took mortality upon Him. As a member of the human family, He was mortal; but as a God, He was the fountain of life to the world. He could, in His divine person, ever have withstood the advances of death, and refused to come under its dominion; but He voluntarily laid down His life, that in so doing He might give life and bring immortality to light. He bore the sins of the world, and endured the penalty, which rolled like a mountain upon His divine soul. He yielded up His life a sacrifice, that man should not eternally die. He died, not through being compelled to die, but by His own free will. This was humility. The whole treasure of heaven was poured out in one gift to save fallen man. He brought into His human nature all the life-giving energies that human beings will need and must receive.[381]

This issue of being "a member of the human family" requires necessary discussion. Expanding the words of the New Testament scholar Beverly Roberts Gaventa – "God brings to an end the 'handing over' of humanity to sin and death by means of another 'handing over', this time of God's son"[382] – beyond their circumstantial intention, I believe that the 'handing over' of the Son of God did imply to think of him as being given into the 'hands' of sin and death in its fullest and most embracing sense. Therefore, the theological concept that the Son of God could risk his divine eternal life implies thinking of him entering human existence with all its characteristics and consequences. Consequently, while some relevant elements of this discussion will be further analysed in the following chapters, like within the context of God's contingency or when discussing how the tomb of Christ could remain closed if he had sinned, it becomes necessary to prepare some ground to discuss the implications of taking up mortality.

3.3 Considering the Implications of the Infinite Risk Scenario

Being 'mortal' is the direct consequence of sin. For White, sin and eternal death are possible in the Incarnation so that Christ could be fully human, a true atonement for sin, and an example to be

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[381] "Christ Man's Example," RH 5 July 1887, para. 4.

[382] Beverly Roberts Gaventa, "Interpreting the Death of Jesus Apocalyptically: Reconsidering Romans 8:32" in *Jesus and Paul Reconnected: Fresh Pathways into an Old Debate* (ed. Todd Still; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 125-145 (esp.136).

followed. The Incarnation creates the space for the divine to meet the deficiency of the human. Therefore, as previously said, it seems consequentially logical to think that impeccability risks excluding the reality of human nature from the act of the Incarnation. The same is true for the divine nature that, by means of immutability, is thus excluded from what the Incarnation entails: becoming fully human.

Incarnation becomes the lens that changes the perspective. It permits us to see how both natures co-exist by mutual influence. While the concept of hypostatic union aims at explaining how the two natures, divine and human, could co-exist, it also often claims for a mutual self-excluding co-habitation where the two natures remain distinct and independent. White argues for a joined divine-human incarnated Son of God able to be tempted, sin, and die like every human being. She thinks in line with Chalcedon with the two natures inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably united. However, she may be critical of Chalcedonian Christology once this affirms the distinction of natures, not taken away by the union and concurring in one person or hypostasis, to the point of an ontological incapability of the divine nature to be affected by the human, thus making the Incarnation an 'unreal' bond of the two natures. She believes that Christ was simultaneously truly God and truly man, but the two distinct natures are understood as interacting in a way in which the sin of human nature may genuinely affect the divine nature. Her approach may then differ from mainstream theology, especially regarding the hypostatic union and the *communicatio idiomatum*, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

Therefore, even if the Incarnation is generally believed not to entail the possibility of sinning and that Christ's temptation does not presuppose the option of giving in to it, the suggestion that Christ was tempted as every human being becomes difficult to be argued without the shadow of the risk of falling. In other words, Christ's death may not be a risk-less moment of suffering if it has to be considered the expression of full incarnational reality. Can the Incarnation be considered God's becoming fully human if it excludes the possibility of Christ succumbing to sin and dying in both natures? Can it be authentic without the risk of sin and eternal death for the divine nature? What, then, would it mean for the Son of God to become human?

It may be argued that White's infinite risk theology reduces or limits the 'quality', or attributes, of the transcendent God. By contrast, the following chapters intend to demonstrate how White's Christology aims to exalt both the transcendent and immanent natures of the incarnated Son of God by shedding light on how the Incarnation affects both natures. This cannot be done without

understanding the connection between White's infinite risk theology and her 'infinite-nuanced' language. This language aims to express the implications of Christ's becoming mortal for his death on the cross. It is necessary because concepts such as impeccability, immutability, and indivisibility prevent the cross from entailing a risk for the Son of God. White's Christology and Soteriology include the risk of the eternal loss of the Son of God. Therefore, it is necessary to turn the attention to some of the main implications of the infinite risk scenario. In this direction, the connection between God's love and risk is a necessary investigation because White inscribes Christ's Incarnation within this dimension. Thus, the following chapter will highlight how God's love is at the basis of White's infinite risk theology and of her understanding of what may be called the sacrifice of Christ. At the same time, it evidences how love implies concepts such as free will, self-offering, and obedience to the Law of God, which are relevant to understanding that Christ should be free to choose sin or not and pay the eternal consequences of the transgression of the Law. Comprehending the reason for Christ's risk and death will ultimately clarify that God's essence is infinite love.

As I continue the exploration of the implications of the infinite risk scenario, following the examination of the interconnections between love and risk, the ensuing analysis will assess the relevance and significance of paired terms such as 'value', 'cost', 'expense', and others within this semantic field, in order to evaluate how White's infinite theological language expresses the relationship between the 'cost' of Christ's death and the 'value' of human beings. White, in fact, argues that the infinite risk comes at an infinite cost because God gave an infinite value to human life. Infinite gain and infinite blessing will be the outcome of infinite risk. After evaluating the concept of infinite value, I will take a closer look at the concept of infinite risk and its implications for the idea of sacrifice, the death of God, and the resurrection. While engaging again with current mainstream Christology and Trinitarian views and many of the theological concepts discussed in the previous chapters, in light of White's infinite risk theology, I will attempt mainly to answer two relevant questions: Could the tomb have remained closed? Could Christ cease to exist, or go out of existence, both as a human being and as God? Other related questions will also find space in the following chapters, leading to a concluding moment for final reflections on White's infinite risk theology.

Chapter 4

Infinite Risk and Infinite Love

White's statements around Christ's infinite risk are not isolated or rare theological explorations. As has been seen in the previous chapters and will still be the subject of further analysis in the following ones, White would often express herself with clear and robust affirmations such as this: "Remember that Christ risked all; 'tempted like as we are,' he staked even his own eternal existence upon the issue of the conflict."[383] In this conflict against sin, White argues that Christ "took the infinite risk of consenting to war with the enemy, that he might conquer him in our behalf."[384] This infinite risk of losing his own existence to save humanity is what White thinks is the greatest expression of God's love. Within this conflict against sin, White sees that "through the love of God, a star of hope illumined the terrible future that spreads before the transgressor."[385] Therefore, it becomes necessary to explore here what White thinks of the relation between risk and love, or as she would call them, the 'infinite' risk and 'infinite' love of God.

White's idea that Christ takes an infinite risk in the Incarnation follows directly from the assumption that "God is love." This assumption is not at all unique to White. It has been widely shared by Christians and theologians throughout history. The Bible itself uses this expression "God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God."[386] However, not all would agree with White that love and risk belong together or that love necessitates an infinite risk to be love itself. Continuing the argument, how central is the cross – with its risk – to the Incarnation? Does the Incarnation need the cross? Does the cross need the risk of the annihilation of divine nature?

4.1 Incarnation and Cross - God's Love towards Humanity

The Incarnation and the cross are not distinct realities for White. She always thinks of both as the necessary beginning and end of the process of salvation. One may not exist without the other. They exist in symbiosis in White's Christology, and I will refer to both, at times as a theological merism,

[383] White, "Seeking the Lost," para. 23.

[384] "The Plan of Salvation," ST 20 February 1893, para. 6.

[385] Ibid., para. 1.

[386] "So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them." (1 John 4:16).

as elements of a unique reality. It is reasonable here to highlight once more, as done elsewhere in this investigation, that when White talks of Christ, she consistently refers to his incarnated person, divine and human. Her use of 'Christ' is mostly done within the incarnational reality, unless she needs to clarify any specific issue regarding his divine pre-existence or human nature. When she uses the title 'Christ' for the incarnated Son of God, it is worth repeating that she never considers him as a *hypostasis* of God from a Trinitarian perspective. As previously discussed, she does not use a doctrine of the pre-existing Logos, but she understands that Father and Son possess the 'same' (type) substance but not 'one' substance. Therefore, she does not use terms such as 'consubstantial', '*homoousios*', or 'coessential' to refer to the relation of Father and Son. Her writings, though they address, at times, the ontological status of the three persons of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, do not do so systematically, nor does White support mainstream Trinitarian doctrine. In his divine status, the Son is "equal with the Father"[387] and "possessing the attributes of God"[388] , but he is not of a single substance with God the Father. In his human status, White claims that the incarnated Son of God, though 'detached' from and ''independent' of the Father, self-existing and equal with him, is a single person (divine and human) experiencing the whole reality of human existence. She simply sees Christ as a whole person, a human person, as every other human being on earth.

As previously said, for White, the Incarnation and cross are not distinct realities; they are both part of the human experience of God and somewhat affect the status of the divine. There might be several perspectives on this question. One could think, for example, that White would hold an Arian doctrine of the Trinity with a hierarchical distinction between the first and second person of the Trinity. In other words, the Father always retains his divine attributes, while Christ, as the second person of the divinity, could be subjected to temporal changes. But, as previously seen (and will be shown again), White's views do not harmonize with Arius'. In a biblically-driven framework, she thinks that the person of Christ, both divine and human, is affected during the timeframe of the Incarnation by the contingency of human life. In the incarnated divine-human person of Christ, the Son of God undergoes a shift as his divinity, with all its attributes, fully merges with humanity and 'subsides' in it. Even though White does not formulate it this way, her infinite risk theology implies thinking that the divine attributes are subjected to the human ones in a sort of reverse concept to the traditional Chalcedonian view of the humanity existing in the divine hypostasis. In this way,

[387] FE, 179.

[388] "Imperative Necessity of Searching for Truth," RH 8 November 1892, para. 3.

divinity becomes susceptible to embodiment. Therefore, in White's theology of infinite risk, the Incarnation brings a change to divinity in the person of Christ. In this sense, through the Incarnation, divinity becomes vulnerable. However, is the vulnerability of the Son extended to the Father? Could the Father remain alone, had Christ sinned and been lost forever? If sin had entered the picture, would the infinite risk also be true for the Father or the Godhead as a whole? Ultimately, all of these questions may be summarised by asking whether the infinite risk could apply only to the Son. In order to further analyse White's theology on this matter, one should start again from the cross.

For White, the cross is never an afterthought. Instead, she perceives the cross as the primary thought of God even before the fall of humankind into sin. Her soteriology postulates a cross before creation. She clarifies this by saying that the salvation of sinners is "a plan devised from eternity in the mind of God!"[389] As early as April 1892, White writes that redemption was not an afterthought, but God had already formulated a plan to redeem man from his fall into sin even before his creation.[390] The biblical text of 1 Peter 1:19-20 may be read in this direction as the sacrifice of Christ is said to be prepared before the foundation of the world.[391]

White may seem to tend towards a supralapsarian Christology when she thinks about the plan of redemption as in the mind of God "from eternity," and not an afterthought. However, she does not ever discuss whether the divine will to incarnate follows (*infra*) or precedes (*supra*) the divine will to allow sin. In this line of reasoning, White may support the idea that the Incarnation is much more than an answer to sin or a way to deal with it, therefore, more than what an infralapsarian Christology would argue for, i.e. the divine will to become incarnate following God's permission of sin. At the same time, she affirms the idea that the Incarnation is an answer to sin and, in that sense, happened because of sin. White is not truly a supralapsarian nor an infralapsarian. While she does think that redemption is not a plan formulated after the fall of Adam, she thinks about this within the framework of God's omniscience. She is sure that God knew everything before the fall of Adam

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[389] GW, 316. Among the numerous statements of similar content, the following ones may provide further light on this topic: "In the councils of heaven, before the world was created, the Father and the Son covenanted together that if man proved disloyal to God, Christ, one with the Father, would take the place of the transgressor, and suffer the penalty of justice that must fall upon him" in "Christ's Sacrifice Testifies to Permanence of God's Law," 21MR No. 1539, 195.

[390] "The plan for our redemption was not an afterthought, a plan formulated after the fall of Adam. It was a revelation of 'the mystery which hath been kept in silence through times eternal.' (Rom. 16:25) It was an unfolding of the principles that from eternal ages have been the foundation of God's throne." DA, 22.

[391] "but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake." See also Ephesians 1:4.

and, therefore, had already thought about the cross. Her view moves towards a sort of *contemporalis*-lapsarian Christology, or a *peri-, dia*-lapsarian position, where both wills happen coincidently, or a Christology that encompasses the whole process of salvation at once, *coaevus*. In this direction, she would probably reject both lapsarian views by holding the position that salvation is a more 'organic' reality with each element mutually dependent rather than one causing the other. In this way, it is impossible to determine a temporal process in God's plan of salvation.[392]

Within this idea that the whole plan of salvation, from the Incarnation to the cross, was already in the mind of God from eternity, White also says that "the sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin is the great truth around which all other truths cluster. In order to be rightly understood and appreciated, every truth in the word of God, from Genesis to Revelation, must be studied in the light that streams from the cross of Calvary."[393] She presents the cross as the lens to understanding God's revelation and as the "great, grand monument of mercy and regeneration, salvation and redemption."[394] As God foresaw the existence of sin, the Son of God lifted on the cross has been the provision to resolve it. Only the Son of God could accomplish the redemption of humanity and, as White says, "only He who knew the height and depth of the love of God could make it manifest. Nothing less than the infinite sacrifice made by Christ in behalf of fallen man could express the Father's love to lost humanity."[395] All of what salvation encompasses is enclosed in the concept of infinite love. However, this infinite love is not 'infinite' if it does not extend its root in what Christ did on the cross and, most of all, in the risk he took in order to save.

According to White, the love of God for the world is revealed in its fullness only through the offer of his Son. These concepts may not differ from other Christian approaches to the life and death of Christ. However, when White claims that Christ made an infinite sacrifice, she thinks that love is risk. Love is a step towards the unknown without promises, answers, or guarantees. Love is no

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[392] See Edwin Chr. Van Driel, *Incarnation Anyway: Arguments for Supralapsarian Christology* (New York, NY: OUP, 2008). The author discusses the motivations for Christ's incarnation surveying the various opinions on *infra-* and *supra-*lapsarianism, with special attention to some major nineteenth and twentieth century theologians. He analyses God's decision to become incarnate and its relation to the 'fall' of Adam within the spheres of creation, redemption, and eschatological consummation, resolving that this last offers the most fruitful supralapsarian Christology unfolding the interpersonal interaction with God as the main motive of incarnation. See also Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation* (vol.2; ed. John Bolt; trans. John Vriend; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004) 382-392, where the author discusses the inadequacy of *supra-* and *infra-*lapsarianism views in doing justice to depth of the question of salvation.

[393] GW, 315.

[394] Ibid.

[395] SC, 14 (ch.1 'God's Love for Man').

reassurance of a 'forever' nor envisages an alternative solution if there is a failure. Love must be intentional and open to brokenness and destruction in order to be truly love. Consequently, love entails the risk of pain, self-loss, and failure. This kind of love, open to fragility and, most of all, to the destabilizing and paradoxical idea of a contingent God subjected to probability, is what White has in mind when she talks of infinite risk. For White, without infinite risk, there is nothing real in salvation.

In her commentary on the biblical book of Acts, White captures the idea of God's love as revealed through the cross with the following statement,

> The Spirit is constantly seeking to draw the attention of men to the great offering that was made on the cross of Calvary, to unfold to the world the love of God, and to open to the convicted soul the precious things of the Scriptures. […] Christ's death proves God's great love for man. It is our pledge of salvation. To remove the cross from the Christian would be like blotting the sun from the sky. The cross brings us near to God, reconciling us to Him. With the relenting compassion of a father's love, Jehovah looks upon the suffering that His Son endured in order to save the race from eternal death, and accepts us in the Beloved.[396]

It is, therefore, through the cross that "we learn that the heavenly Father loves us with a love that is infinite." [397] Love, sacrifice, and infinite risk are intertwined indissolubly in the Incarnation and revealed on the cross. As White would say, the revelation of God's infinite love is in itself revealed in the death of Christ, and the love of the Father is seen in the sacrifice of his Son.[398] In the words of Hans Schwarz, "when we know about his death, we know about God's essence: he is a loving God."[399] Otherwise stated, comprehending what the death of Christ entailed or could have entailed if he had sinned sheds light on God's love towards humanity. Understanding how the story of the cross could have been different if there was the possibility of failing offers a different

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[396] AA, 52, 209.

[397] Ibid., 210.

[398] Ibid., 245. "But to Paul the cross was the one object of supreme interest. Ever since he had been arrested in his career of persecution against the followers of the crucified Nazarene he had never ceased to glory in the cross. At that time there had been given him a revelation of the infinite love of God, as revealed in the death of Christ; and a marvelous transformation had been wrought in his life, bringing all his plans and purposes into harmony with heaven. From that hour he had been a new man in Christ. He knew by personal experience that when a sinner once beholds the love of the Father, as seen in the sacrifice of His Son, and yields to the divine influence, a change of heart takes place, and henceforth Christ is all and in all."

[399] Hans Schwarz, *Christology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 179.

perspective on the depth of God's love.

Here is where White's idea of God's love diverts drastically from mainstream perceptions of God. While she holds to divine omniscience and omnipotence, among many other divine attributes, she also understands that the Incarnation of the Son of God brought some inexplicable changes to the divinity. Moreover, she is sure that the story of the cross was open to a different end because Christ could sin. Process theologian David R. Griffin (1939-2022) says that "when the Aristotelean unchanging God was combined with the biblical God who knows the world, it became necessary in order to achieve a self-consistent position, to deny all genuine contingency."[400] Consequently, is White somewhat embracing a form of process theology, or dipolar theism, where even if claiming that God is indeed in all respects eternal, immutable, and impassible, in some respects, he may be temporal, changeable, and affected by the world? White does not seem to fully embrace the rejection of the metaphysics of process theism, which privileges 'becoming' over 'substance' in reference to God. Her views of God and the infinite risk are expressly framed within her concept of the Incarnation and, therefore, set within the boundary of Christ's earthly life. What she thinks is that in the lifespan of the incarnated Son of God, the second person of the Godhead is indeed affected by human circumstances, such as joys and sorrows, sufferings and death. In this sense, to be affected by temporal processes is an essential attribute of the incarnated God.

However, White's infinite risk theology leads further to the potentially unsettling notion of a vulnerable God. Christ, as the Son of God, places his own eternal life at risk because of love and because, in a certain way, he 'needs' humanity so that his love may be true and genuine. He is also somewhat dependent on that humanity which he assumes. Therefore, risk and love entail an idea of God different from the Aristotelian concept of the 'unmoved mover' and somewhat open to contingency and probability. On the one hand, White seems to convey a metaphysical idea of God along the lines of the conventional view of the divine attributes of omniscience, omnipotence, immutability, and perfection, among others. At the same time, her theology of the infinite risk requires thinking about divinity as vulnerable and contingent. How do these opposite positions stand together? Is White aware of the contradiction or tension between the contingent God who would allow for a risk and the metaphysical God who is unchangeable and perfect? Does she explain it? White's understanding of God in relation to her theological concept of infinite risk is therefore

[400] David R. Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil: A Process Theodicy* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1976), 44.

relevant to this investigation.

In an almost paradoxical way, at one level, one needs to think about God as immutable; otherwise, there would be nothing special about the Incarnation. The Incarnation would not be something unique without God's immutability. In fact, if one argues that God has always been mutable and changeable, then he would have always faced an infinite risk in all that he did. Even when he created the world, he could have done things wrong. Since God does not risk failure in creating the world because he is perfect, the idea that there is a risk stands in a very deliberate tension, if not paradox, with God's perfection. The same is, therefore, valid for the relation between a metaphysical and a vulnerable God. Vulnerability is a constituent characteristic of being human and mortal. Invulnerability is instead only divine. The tension between the two elements characterizing the human and divine natures is not easy to resolve. Indeed, risk is not a category of divine agency by and large. One needs to grasp the paradox in order to understand the relevance of the infinite risk in White's theology. The risk is specific to the Incarnation and contrasts the perfection of God. Hence, White advocates for the exclusive reality of the Incarnation as the solution, as the absolute and unique space and time for an incomprehensible, albeit somehow logical, transformation or change of the essential attributes of the incarnated God.

It follows that Christ's Incarnation and death signpost God's openness to risk and, consequently, to chance and uncertainty. If Christ's openness to sin is, then, also openness to the unexpected and the unthinkable, would God himself become 'vulnerable'? As God's Law reflects his own identity, it becomes necessary at this stage to understand how God's demands of obedience are linked to the question of infinite risk. In other words, if God the Son became in a sense 'vulnerable' once he took human nature under the Law, in the Pauline language of the Letter to the Galatians,[401] and if, therefore, the story of the Incarnation could be open to contingency, had he sinned, was he then accountable to his own Law?

4.2 God's Contingency: an Implication of the Law?

Love constitutes the ground for Christ's free choice to incarnate in human nature with all this implies or could have implied. Love takes risks and cannot be deterministic. Therefore, assuming

[401] "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law" (Galatians 4:4). See also Romans 3:19; 7:1.

the human condition places Christ in the position of choosing or rejecting sin, transgressing or following the Law, obeying or disobeying, and, paradoxically, choosing or rejecting God the Father or, even more strikingly, his own divine essence. As Johannes Zachhuber says, one of the perspectives on the death of Christ is that he "reconciles the world to God through his obedience in accepting, on behalf of all humanity, the punishment the latter would have incurred by trespassing God's commandment."[402] This obedient act of compliance to the Law, however, for White does not seem to rest upon the acceptance of whatever was needed to save humanity – i.e. sin, punishment, and the cross – as a form of *oboedentia passiva* (passive obedience), but on an active decision of risking all to save humanity. White would say, "Remember that Christ risked all. For our redemption, heaven itself was imperiled."[403]

For White, love itself demands free will and, by implication, entails risk. Therefore, an understanding of God's infinite love may only be perceived, for White, through the lens of an infinite sacrifice where the risk of failure was genuinely potential. Christ's acceptance of the cross is an active and conscious choice prompted by his love. Even if the framework of passive obedience interprets the passion and death of Christ as a voluntary and wilful act, White thinks that Christ reconciled the world to God by doing much more than only offering forgiveness for transgressing or breaking the Law. Christ also lived a life to offer righteousness, which could be true only if he was vulnerable to unrighteousness. What is active obedience? Would forgiveness be sufficient to reconcile humanity with God?

One of the main differences between active and passive obedience rests on the fact that, in a way, forgiveness is not all that humanity may need when breaking God's Law. White's theological legacy, Adventist theologians, would talk of 'imputed' justice and 'imparted' justice to describe the need for forgiveness with the first term and the need for righteousness with the latter. In other words, Christ satisfied the demands of the Law by dying on the cross and paying for the sins of humanity, but by living a righteous life through his humanity, he has at the same time perfectly obeyed God's Law. Passive obedience, as 'imputed' justice, guarantees the forgiveness of sin, while active obedience, as 'imparted' justice, credits perfect righteousness to human beings. Both forms of obedience are necessary and not mutually exclusive.

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[402] Johannes Zachhuber, "Modern Discourse on Sacrifice and its Theological Background," in *Sacrifice and Modern Thought* (eds. Johannes Zacchuber and Julia Meszaros; Oxford: OUP, 2013), 12-28, (19).
[403] COL, 196.

It is not unusual to think of Christ's obedience to God's Law as active and his paying of the penalty for humankind's failure to obey the Law, with the cross, as passive obedience. Thus, Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) held that the life of Christ should be seen as a whole from conception to cross and recapitulated in his suffering and death. He writes that "in his suffering and death, the whole of Christ's preceding life was incorporated, summed up, and completed. The case is rather that Christ's entire life and work, from his conception to his death, was substitutionary in nature."[404] Bavinck thinks that the entire life of Christ has been substitutionary in nature. Christ did not commit any sin; he died for humanity's sins. As he died in the place of humanity, he also lived a righteous life in the place of humanity. While he paid the penalty of our breaking the Law of God, the cross is not setting the limits of his sacrifice. His perfect obedience carries Christ to the cross, but also through the tomb and beyond. John Murray (1898-1975) operates in the same framework as Bavinck. He says that "it is our Lord's whole work of obedience in every phase and period that is described as active and passive, and we must avoid the mistake of thinking that the active obedience applies to the obedience of his life and the passive obedience to the obedience of his final sufferings and death."[405]

White does not disagree with these and other theologians who see both passive and active obedience intersecting in the life and death of Christ, but by saying that "Christ risked all", she takes a step further, claiming that the eternal loss of Christ's own existence, had he sinned, would have been the only full satisfaction of the righteous requirements of the Law. Why is this so important? Christ has been faithful to the Law until his death and could carry this obedience beyond the tomb because he was willing to accept the cost of failure and pay for its consequences. This obedience is not only active or passive and differs from compliance and conformity. It is not obedience without a real risk of failure only because God sets the rules. It is not obedience to self-imposed constraints. Instead, Christ responded to the request of obedience made by the Law by exercising the ability to obey. This is where Christ's obedience is the result of his willpower, a self-reflecting understanding that obeying the Law is possible and the risk of not obeying it is real. It is a form of obedience that is not duty, rewarded or paid, nor the result of fear, but the obedience of a lover.

Even in those Scriptural passages, especially in Paul, where the emphasis is placed on the contrast between obedience and freedom, White argues that obedience to the Law is still demanded even if

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[404]Herman Bavinck , *Reformed Dogmatics: Sin and Salvation in Christ* (vol. 3; ed. John Bolt; trans. John Vriend; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 378.

[405] John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 16.

Christ's death granted freedom from its condemnation to all those who believe in him.[406] Christ's obedience to the Law is 'love-willing' obedience. It is more than not resisting the cross and passively dying as a victim. It is more than Christ's perfect righteousness obtained by active obedience to the Law. It is love-willing obedience that rests on the fact that Christ was willing to face his very last day of life on the earth, as incarnated Son of God, as if it were indeed his only last, in its most total sense.

Thus, generally, passive obedience points to Christ's dying for humanity, and active obedience refers to Christ living for humanity, at times respectively understood as addressing Christ's identity as victim and priest. In this train of thoughts, elaborating on Albrecht Ritschl's (1822-1889) and Horace Bushnell's (1802-1876) ideas of sacrificial obedience[407] and arguing for the latter's more active than the first's, Zachhuber recognizes that Christ's sacrifice may be understood as *self*-sacrifice and, within this framework, "the identity of priest and victim in Christ has here been fully merged into the notion that his willingness to give something up for the sake of others *in itself* becomes emblematic of sacrifice."[408] For White, the object of Christ's willingness to give something up is his own existence, both divine and human. In this sense, he is not only victim and priest, but Christ's love-willing obedience also expresses his full identity as a human being. Together with dying and living for humanity, Christ is also living like, and risking his eternal life for humanity. This identity is his openness to vulnerability and contingency and to the risk of non-existence. It is his unrestrained presence in time and space choosing to die, potentially forever, with humanity in the attempt to save it. This makes Christ's obedience an authentic outcome of his love.

According to White, the offering of Christ on the cross was a free gift to humanity out of his infinite love. Thus, pursuing humanity's salvation by risking the eternal loss of the Son of God is the most embracing expression of God's love. This love impelled God to 'subdue' himself, in the person

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[406] "The law reveals to man his sins, but it provides no remedy. While it promises life to the obedient, it declares that death is the portion of the transgressor. The gospel of Christ alone can free him from the condemnation or defilement of sin. He must exercise repentance toward God, whose law has been transgressed, and faith in Christ, his atoning sacrifice. Thus he obtains 'remission of sins that are past,' and becomes a partaker of the divine nature. He is a child of God, having received the spirit of adoption, whereby he cries, 'Abba, Father!'", GW88, 467; "Through the atoning blood of Christ the sinner is set free from bondage and condemnation; through the perfection of the sinless Substitute and Surety, he may run in the race of humble obedience to all God's commandments. Without Christ he is under the condemnation of the law, always a sinner, but through faith in Christ he is made just before God," in "The Way to Christ," ST 12 December 1892, para. 7.

[407] Horace Bushnell, *The Vicarious Sacrifice: Grounded in Principles of Universal Obligation* (New York, NY: Scribner, 1871); Albrecht Ritschl, *Die christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung* (3 vols. 2nd ed.; Bonn: Marcus, 1881-2); Idem, *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002).

[408] Zachhuber, "Modern Discourse on Sacrifice and its Theological Background," 21.

of the Son, to the demands of the Law and the consequences of its transgression. While sin creates separation from God, the Incarnation establishes a bond of divinity and humanity that goes beyond comprehension and is enfolded, as White would say, in the "bosom of infinite love."[409]

Could God, therefore, be open to chance? White's famous book *The Great Controversy* sheds light on this question. In this book, written as early as 1888, she emphasizes that redemption was not the only purpose of Christ's suffering and death. His Incarnation was also aimed at magnifying the Law of the Ten Commandments and demonstrating its unchangeable nature. In a way, the Incarnation revealed both God's plan of redemption and the essence of his being: love. The Law is the expression of God's nature, identity, and character. Could the claims of the Law have been set aside, there was no reason for the Son of God to offer his life for the salvation of humanity.

Moreover, "the sacrifice to which infinite love impelled the Father and the Son, that sinners might be redeemed, demonstrates to all the universe—what nothing less than this plan of atonement could have sufficed to do—that justice and mercy are the foundation of the law and government of God."[410] Infinite love exerted a strong moral pressure on the Father and the Son to demonstrate the immutability of the Law as the expression of divine nature. The sacrifice is thus understood as both of the Father and of the Son. What did impel this sacrifice? As White writes, it is infinite love that somehow forced, urged, or impelled God to sacrifice himself for humanity. This love calls out for action. The very expression of divine nature would then require the same Son of God to be subdued to the Law's condemnation of sin.

It is difficult to concur with White that even the Son of God had to bear the penalty of the transgression, if the Law demanded an eternal separation from the Father once sin had been committed. Many would ask: How could the author of the Law be somehow dependent on its demand? Can one say that God was 'subjected' to his own Law? Clearly, for White, the Law could exert its power of condemnation even over the Son of God as a divine being. This claim cannot be accepted lightly. The vast majority of theologians undoubtedly would oppose it, and a dose of scepticism becomes necessary. However, if Christ's obedience is an authentic act of submission to the Law, then the infinite risk is only possible if the Law exercises some authority over Christ. If Christ could transgress the Law, then the Law has ultimate power over Christ's destiny.

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[409] DA, 25-26.

[410] GC88, 503.

Does the Law have a Trinitarian dimension for White? In other words, in Trinitarian terms, is the Law a manifestation of God? Does the Law show or embody the divinity? Indeed, as previously said, White thinks of the Law as the expression of God's love and a representation of his character and identity. The Law reveals God as love, as the Incarnation does. Consequently, if the Law may be related to the Incarnation at the level of what they both actually reveal, and if both the Law and the Incarnation may be considered a revelation of God, could the Law be understood as a sort of incarnational reality? In other words, if the Incarnation is the incarnation of the Word, God in the flesh, is not then also the Law a kind of Word of God and, as such, his incarnation? Can the Law be considered as an ultimately eternal incarnation, an incarnation before the Incarnation?

This is not the language White would use; nonetheless, I see her position on the Law logically pointing to the above argument and to the question of the Law's role in Trinitarian doctrine and Christology. One could object that if Incarnation may imply 'becoming flesh', the Law is not 'flesh'. However, if the Law can be understood as a manifestation of God, it is also a form of 'materialization' of him. If it is possible to speak about the Word of God as a manifestation of God, it makes sense to think that the Law is another manifestation of the Word and, thus, of God.

In a way, the Law may indeed be recognized as an incarnational reality if understood as a manifestation or even an embodiment of God. In this sense, by embodying the character of God, the Law makes visible what is invisible, namely God himself and his essence. If God is made a human person in Christ, the Law also 'embodied' God as a visualization of God's identity. The term 'embodiment' generally means the representation or expression of someone/something in a tangible or visible form. Embodiment, in the cases of both Christ and the Law, may be understood in terms of their role in representing the divine to the human. Christ's bodily presence as the divine made human, and the Law as the expression of the identity of the divine to the human, are constructed within the context of divine-human relation and interaction. This embodied reality aims at giving corporeality to the divine. The Law may be understood as God's description in graphically human terms, as Christ is a human theophany.

While the Law manifests God's identity, thus implying both his love and his justice, Christ embodies God's offer of redemption and life. One points to the other, and both are part of God's revelation. The Law claims for the penalty of sin to be paid, and Christ offers salvation by living a life according to the Law. Consequently, God's identity and perfect character are revealed through both. Therefore, both Christ and the Law may be perceived as an 'incarnational' reality, an embodiment

or personification of God's presence. They are a visual manifestation of divine reality. This incarnation is a form of bringing the divine experience closer to the human one and, more paradoxically and striking, the experience of the human closer to the divine. Within this conceptual and theological framework, the Law may then be seen as an incarnation before the Incarnation. Consequently, if one thinks of Christ as needing to fulfil the Law and be under it as a human, then the Law, by aligning with the Father and by means of its pre-existing status as incarnational reality, could be authoritative over the Son of God incarnated. Obviously, Christ would not struggle to keep the Law in his divinity, but it is in his humanity that the perspective changes. Therefore, it is clear that the infinite risk is somewhat related to Christ being human and so closely associated with humanity in his earthly life. The unity of divine and human in Christ is so close that the risk, somewhat incurred on the human side, spills over to the divine side. This is probably what White must mean by envisaging a union of divine and human so close that God could not be human without the dimension of contingency. He could not be human without the risk of experiencing a love that, by its very nature, is free and freely obeys. It follows that the Law, as it embodies God's love by pointing to the greatest good, becomes the standard of love to which even the incarnated Son of God should comply at the risk of his eternal loss.

Here is where infinite risk and love enter again into White's Christological reasoning, and she departs from prevailing Christology. Certainly, solving the 'equation' of salvation is a difficult task. When one thinks of God's sacrificial love, it becomes necessary to think of it both as a reflection of God's perfection and a demonstration of the depth of his self-denial. Could love be love if it is not open to self-annihilation in order to save others? Here is where the antithesis enters the picture: How can God be both perfect and perfectly self-denying to save humanity? How can he retain his divinity while entering humanity if, from the start, this should be an act of self-denial to the uttermost?

White thinks about the cross as the place where God paid an infinite price for humanity's redemption and where "his self-denial and self-sacrifice, His unselfish labor, His humiliation, above all, the offering up of His life, testifies to the depth of His love for fallen man."[411] Paradoxically, God's perfection may not be less than full self-denial and self-sacrifice, even if this implies a kind of self-negation of his own nature and existence. This is what love would demand; this is what a sacrificial

[411] 5T, 603.

love would have to be in order to be 'sacrificial'. In other words, if Christ knew the humiliation, the sorrows, and the suffering he would have to undergo to save humanity, and if he accepted to be challenged even as God, ready to give himself up in the most extreme and mysterious way, then his love would truly be sacrificial. Consenting to become a human being meant also consenting to the option of becoming a sinner if the Law was transgressed, and a mortal in the deepest and truest sense of that word. As White would put it, "his death answered the question as to whether there was self-denial with the Father and the Son."[412] Indeed, this implicit question sums up the problem, but it is not all too often the main Christological question in theological debates. Was there self-denial, self-sacrifice for the Godhead at the cross? The denial of God's own existence becomes the greatest demonstration of his infinite love. Therefore, the infinite risk is a constituent of God's love. Here is where love impelled God to take a step towards being 'subjected' to the immutability of his own Law and, by consequence, to the condemnation that it may require in case of sin. In a paradoxically reversed picture, infinite love made the Son of God 'submit' to the expression of his own character, the Law. God becomes somehow the 'object' of love.

Furthering the relevance of the Law for the question of the infinite risk taken by Christ in the Incarnation, it becomes necessary to briefly hint out that White believes that the transgression of the Law has been advanced by the highest of all created beings, the angel Lucifer, later known as Satan. He started a rebellion for supremacy in heaven and wished to conquer the Son of God. He then tempted Adam and Eve to transgress the Law and be eternally separated from God.[413] Following White's reasoning, the Son of God has felt the eternal separation that Satan wanted to bring between God and humankind because of its transgression of the Law. Christ's life has been exposed to the risk of such a separation to be irrevocably eternal. Had he sinned, humanity would have been lost forever, and Christ would have shared its fate. Therefore, the results of the cross are beyond understanding to the point that White affirms that "in Christ we become more closely united to God than if we had never fallen."[414] The kind of bond created by the Incarnation between humanity and God is even greater than that produced by creation. "In taking our nature, the Saviour has bound Himself to humanity by a tie that is never to be broken. Through the eternal ages He is

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[412] "The Plan of Salvation," ST 20 February 1893, para. 9.

[413] For further study on White's demonology see Marko Kolic, "The Demonology of Ellen G. White," *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2009): 98-105; see also the recent compilation of writings of White on the question of Lucifer, his identity and his works, from his creation to his destruction, in Ellen G. White, *Luificer – How Art Thou Fallen?* (Brushton, NY: Teach Services, Inc. 2007).

[414] DA, 25.

linked with us."[415] In White's words, the Father has not only left his Son to bear the sins of the world and die as a sacrifice, but he literally "gave Him to the fallen race."[416] He became truly a member of the human family with all that this may imply, and he retains his human nature forever, even after the resurrection.

Love is at the basis of this unthinkable divine sacrifice. Thus, Christ can link the highest form of existence, the divine one, and the lowest of all, that of humanity rejected and condemned as a sinner. The Pauline saying, that Christ "emptied himself," (Philip. 2:7) may then mean for White the willingness to empty himself also of his deity and, consequently, stop being God. This would give a different perspective to any kenotic theology. In 'simple' terms, this act of emptying signifies Christ's self-renunciation as a sort of openness to setting aside both himself and his divine essence and, most of all, the uninterrupted relationship with the Father and the Spirit. More than considering merely humanity as his act of emptying, infinite risk theology points to the ultimate expression of humanity, the sinful one subjected to the consequence of the transgression of the Law, eternal death and separation from God. All of this is possible because love sacrifices all.

4.3 On the Eternity of the Incarnation

How one thinks about the relationship between God and humanity is indeed a relevant question for all theologies. This relation has its focal point in Christology. Probably, traditional theology tended to deny that Christ could have sinned precisely because it found no way to think of a divine-human unity that could allow for this kind of contingency without further consequences for the doctrine of God and, more broadly, all other related theological concepts.

As previously said, White affirms that in Christ, humanity becomes more closely united with God than before Adam's fall into sin and that Christ retains his human nature after the resurrection. In Christ, earth and heaven are bound together and "heaven is enshrined in humanity, and humanity is enfolded in the bosom of Infinite Love."[417] Thus, the Incarnation creates a link between divinity and humanity even closer and stronger than the pre-lapsarian relational status. White would also say it with the following words: "God has adopted human nature in the person of His Son, and has

[415] Ibid.
[416] Ibid.
[417] Ibid., 25-26.

carried the same into the highest heaven."[418] Consequently, while infinite love entails all that becoming human may imply, infinite risk points to the unbreakable tie that infinite love has created between humanity and divinity. Humanity is thus brought up to heaven and assimilated in divinity. Paradoxically, the risk of eternal separation – if Christ had sinned – produced its opposite, an even more robust and durable lasting union. Divinity is preserved, embodied in humanity as a proper receptacle, while humanity is enclosed, surrounded by infinite divine love.

Following this line of reasoning, here is where this particular element of White's specific theology is brought into the picture to expand on the comprehension of the infinite risk. As stated, White argues that humanity is more closely united with divinity in Christ than if a fall had never occurred. Moreover, humanity is retained after the resurrection as she thinks of an unbreakable and lasting tie between the two natures. As briefly hinted in the previous chapter,[419] White states that for salvation to be achieved, Christ, as the Son of God, needed to become "one of the human family, forever to retain His human nature."[420] In White's view, the Incarnation is indeed an irreversible reality. In other words, Christ cannot hold his divine nature apart from the human one after the cross. The conjunction of human and divine natures is permanent. Christ is one with the Father in nature, while he joins humanity in its deepest and most authentic sense, becoming one with it. The Incarnation produces an irreversible union of divinity and humanity, which continues existing before, during, and after the cross. This concept is often foreign, if not at all, to incarnational theology.

White's incarnational model sees the infinite risk as the main evidence of the irreversible union of humanity and divinity in Christ. She argues that the Incarnation is, in a sense, an eternal reality. However, does she assert that the Incarnation existed even before the Incarnation? The previous section has claimed that the Law may indeed be recognized as an incarnational reality if understood as a manifestation of God. In a way similar to the Incarnation of Christ, the Law embodies God in a visible and tangible form. If Christ may be understood as the bodily presence of the divine made human, then the Law is a materialization of the expression of such a divine identity. As God is eternal, and thus is his Law, this conceptual and theological framework gives space to think of the Law as an incarnation before the Incarnation. In this line of thought, while incarnation as a form of materialization of God may be seen as an eternal principle exemplified in the Law, White's

[418] Ibid., 25.

[419] See 3.3.1 "A Veiled Divinity (*katapetasma* Incarnational Model): Only Humanity could reach Humanity."

[420] DA, 25.

Christology claims that this principle makes Christ's Incarnation an eternal reality from the moment of his assuming a human form. White argues that divinity and humanity will be forever united in the person of the divine Son of God. Following this reasoning and, therefore, assuming that, in order for this incarnational reality to be eternal after the birth of Christ, it had to be somehow eternal before that, how might this be understood beyond the question of the Law? There may be at least two perspectives on this subject. If the Incarnation is intended as eternal, somewhat even prior to Christ's own Incarnation on earth, as it seems to be advanced by the Law as incarnational reality, then this concept would reduce the importance of the real Incarnation of Christ. The story of Christ loses its unique significance, as it would only be a small chapter in a much longer story, and the 'risk' would lose its significance. However, from another point of view, if the Incarnation is eternal, then it is at the very centre of the being of God.

Whichever way this may be understood, this idea of eternal Incarnation, even if only from the birth of Christ, raises a number of problems. Firstly, humanity is limited in time and space. Human beings are born, live, and die. How, then, could this incarnational reality of divine and human natures be eternal? How can it be genuinely the union with the individual human, Jesus of Nazareth? White thinks about Christ in eternity as a reverse of the historical Incarnation. Christ is a bridge between natures, a father and a brother simultaneously. As of then, humanity played the predominant role in his incarnational reality, so after the cross, his divinity fully conquered humanity. What follows from this idea? White does not explain it. However, she does not think that being human for eternity implies being eternally subjected to sin, suffering and death, overall to the contingency of human life. However, what other possible interpretations could there be?

Again, focusing on the infinite risk, it appears likely that she considers it to be a temporary risk. In other words, she arguably must think that the infinite risk was tied exclusively to the historical Incarnation. Thus, even if Christ is united with humanity in eternity, this does not mean that he is still subjected to the contingency of human life and always exposed to the potential risk of eternal death.[421] She may think of the Incarnation as the starting point of a new relational status between divinity and humanity. Therefore, this union of the divine with the human is not just a general statement about God being united with creation. It is a bond created by the Incarnation and

[421] While humanity itself, in Christ, is not exposed to that risk any longer after his atoning sacrifice, every human being is still subject to eternal perdition if grace is not accepted.

authenticated by the risk Christ took in it. It follows that in light of White's theology of infinite risk, there must be something unique about those years of Christ on earth.

The uniqueness of the earthly life of Christ rests on the presence of the cross and all that it entails. Such a presence, however, is for White to be understood, as previously discussed, in the horizon of a cross before creation. This concept does not constitute an ontological contradiction when the cross is considered central to the Incarnation because it happened only once. As it happened to the human Christ, as well as to the divine Christ, the cross remains a reality pre-seen before creation and acted out in the Incarnation. The cross is where both natures meet to be inseparably united by the experience of death. This is the point of the infinite risk. This tie could have been eternal both in death and life. Had Christ sinned, he would have shared humanity's condemnation right after the cross. As White would say, the tomb would have remained closed. Instead, as Christ has been obedient to the Law, the cross is where his obedience is validated and he could retain his divine nature, though joined eternally with humanity. This is highlighted by White's affirmation that in heaven "one reminder alone remains: Our Redeemer will ever bear the marks of His crucifixion. Upon His wounded head, upon His side, His hands and feet, are the only traces of the cruel work that sin has wrought. […] through the eternal ages the wounds of Calvary will show forth His praise and declare His power."[422] These wounds, which are signs of humanity, will continue marking the divine Son of God for eternity. As White would say,

> In Christ glorified they will behold Christ crucified. […] Never will it be forgotten that He whose power created and upheld the unnumbered worlds through the vast realms of space, the Beloved of God, the Majesty of heaven, He whom cherub and shining seraph delighted to adore — humbled Himself to uplift fallen man; that He bore the guilt and shame of sin, and the hiding of His Father's face, till the woes of a lost world broke His heart and crushed out His life on Calvary's cross. That the Maker of all worlds, the Arbiter of all destinies, should lay aside His glory and humiliate Himself from love to man will ever excite the wonder and adoration of the universe. [423]

[422] GC88, 674.
[423] Ibid., 651.

Christ glorified will always be also Christ crucified. Divinity and humanity will join in the second person of the Godhead, the Son of God, and never will be forgotten that he laid aside his glory to take up humanity because of his "love to man."

This infinite love of Christ is then altruistic love. It is a love that finds its most significant expression in the life the Saviour lived in favour of the sinners and in his death on the cross. In the words of White, one should behold the "infinite love of Jesus, who, suffering the most intense agony of mind and body, thought only of others and encouraged the penitent soul to believe."[424] It is precisely in this 'thinking only of others' that Christ's love finds its most significant expression in a sacrifice where everything else, even his own divinity, has a secondary place and may be forfeited to save humanity.

It may be interesting to note briefly, at this point, that while the question of the relation between the love of Christ and the infinite risk he took in the Incarnation does not find a real space in scholarly debate, a language similar to White, on this matter, often characterizes meditative reflections of hortatory character on the love of Christ expressed at the cross. Examples of this are the work of Barrett and Stibbe, who offer a sort of compassionate understanding of salvation, however, with very different presuppositions. In his work, *The Measure and the Pledge of Love: Reflections on the Cross,* Peter F. Barrett uses words that could easily express an idea similar to White's. He writes that "God so loved the world that, in Christ, he loved it to the bitterest end."[425] Obviously, this does not imply for Barrett that, even if Christ offered all of himself to the bitterest end for the salvation of humanity, his death could have been eternal. It is interesting that Barrett's wording often characterizes how Christianity talks of Christ's sacrifice. However, the point for White rests instead on the understanding that Christ truly did it without reservation. It is in the unlimitedness of his sacrifice that one should find the very "bitterest end." What could better shape a "bitterest end" if not an infinite risk? If, in a way, as Barrett says, God "so" loved the world, would not then the "bitterest end" be the expression of the dimension of this divine love? In other words, if God's love may be defined with superlatives, then Christ's death with risk is way "more" than his death without it. There is no bitterest end or deepest annihilation than risking one's own existence. This is the framework to measure God's love and speak about it carefully.

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[424] DA, 752.

[425] Peter F. Barrett, *The Measure and the Pledge of Love: Reflections on the Cross* (Blackrock, Co. Dublin: Columba Press: APCK, 2002), 9.

Mark Stibbe also exemplifies the same argument. With the very suggestive title, *My Father's Tears: the Cross and the Father's Love,* Stibbe also explores the agony of the cross in relation to the love of God in his book. He does it in light of the suffering of the Son for the absence of the Father, the Father's suffering for the pain of the Son, and the Holy Spirit's role as the bond of love holding them all together. The author intends to highlight the value of the cross as an example of how much God loves humanity. Therefore, he writes that "Christ's love on the cross is accordingly the ultimate demonstration of God's perfect love, causing perfect love for God and neighbour to be 'enkindled' in our hearts."[426] The kind of love depicted by Stibbe is what many would think of when talking about the love revealed by God in the death of the cross. However, what White thinks is that the ultimate demonstration of God's love does not rest only on the cross but on what a post-cross scenario could have been if Christ had sinned. Christ offering his life for the salvation of humanity at the risk of his eternal loss is what "ultimate demonstration" of love means for White.

Similarly to White, Stibbe also thinks that the death of Christ plays a vital role in reuniting divinity with humanity so that this last could experience the fullness of divine love. Stibbe writes that Christ "died for us so that our separation from the Father's love could be brought to an end and we could experience an ecstatic reconciliation with the Love of all loves in the Father's house."[427] The 'Love of all loves', as Stibbe would call it, or the 'infinite love' of God, as White often used to say, is surely understood as being demonstrated at the cross. God himself may also be understood as the Love of all loves personified. In the words of White, God's love "was a surprise to the world."[428] In this way, she expresses the idea that divine love exceeds human understanding and continues to generate questions. This characteristic of 'surprise' lends itself well to addressing the enigmatic infinite love of God. It is indeed surprising to think of God risking, literally, all to save humanity. This is where White argues for an "infinite mystery of love and wisdom in the plan of redemption."[429] This theme of redemptive love is the object of her earnest interest and, in her words, "the science and the song of the redeemed throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity."[430] Thus, eternity is the 'moment' for an

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[426] Mark Stibbe, *My Father's tears: the cross and the Father's love* (London: SPCK, 2014), 149; see also Leslie Badham, *Love speaks from the Cross* (Kingswood: World's Work, 1956). Badham talks of how the cross speaks of the incredible love of God, especially of Christ's compassion, tenderness and concern for others' pain.

[427] Stibbe, *My Father's tears*, 99.

[428] "The Divine Teacher," SpTEd (n.p., 1897; republished in FE), 173.

[429] PP, 602.

[430] CE, 57.

endless study of divine love because, as White would say, the "infinite love and mercy of Jesus, the sacrifice made in our behalf, calls for the most serious and solemn reflection."[431]

When White thinks of God's love, she inherently thinks of the Infinite risk as its most significant expression. This is why she is puzzled at the thought of describing the love revealed by the sacrifice of Christ. This is made clear by the following statement, which she pens already in 1894,

> When we seek for appropriate language in which to describe the love of God, we find words too tame, too weak, too far beneath the theme, and we lay down our pen and say, 'No, it cannot be described.' […] In attempting any description of this love, we feel that we are as infants lisping their first words. Silently we may adore; for silence in this matter is the only eloquence. This love is past all language to describe. It is the mystery of God in the flesh, God in Christ, and divinity in humanity. Christ bowed down in unparalleled humility, that in his exaltation to the throne of God, he might also exalt those who believe in him, to a seat with him upon his throne. All who look upon Jesus in faith that the wounds and bruises that sin has made will be healed in him, shall be made whole.[432]

White sees the task of describing the love of God as beyond human language. This is why she feels prompted to lay down the pen before the challenge, as words are not enough to express what only the sacrifice on the cross may vividly picture. She accepts that silence may often be the only available choice when dealing with concepts such as 'divinity in humanity', 'God in the flesh', and 'God in Christ'. Following White's language, the Incarnation constitutes the means for restoration. On this point, none would argue. Common soteriological language takes here space when White talks of restoring man to a seat with God on his throne or that Christ's death and wounds are the remedies to the sickness of sin. What results in greater interest is the idea of Christ bowing down in unparalleled humility. White remains in awe in front of such an expression of infinite love. She has undoubtedly in mind the risk of Christ's eternal loss when she talks of his humiliation. This is reflected in the choice of the adjective 'unparalleled' to describe the exceptional incarnated life and death of the Son of God, where eternity was not at all guaranteed.

Within this framework of 'extreme' humiliation, Oord writes, while talking about the kenotic discourse of Paul to the Philippians, that the apostle "points to Jesus Christ, who divinely acts as the

[431] Ibid., 57.
[432] Ibid., 77.

primary example of someone who expresses other-oriented love. Jesus' love is evident, says Paul, in his diminished power and his service to others."[433] According to Thomas Jay Oord, in his book *The Uncontrolling Love of God,* Christ's diminished power revealed at the cross as a sort of weakness becomes the most potent example of how much God loves the world. Moltmann is well known for the idea of the weakness of the cross as the powerful action of God for the good of others.[434] In this line of thought, White believes that God's infinite love is indeed demonstrated at the cross, and the deepest expression of humanity's weakness – death – is thus fully assumed in the risk of eternal death. Actually, White's infinite risk theology is a step further into the idea of weakness, as there is no weaker weakness than that expressed by eternal death.

This is why White continues using the language of 'infinite' within the semantic frame of weakness where expressions such as 'degradation', 'fallen race', 'to reach', and 'to elevate' highlight the depth of the sacrifice of Christ, "the infinite Gift of Calvary."[435] She writes that the love of Christ for "the fallen race was so great that he made an infinite sacrifice to reach them in their degradation, and through his divine power finally elevate them to his throne."[436] This infinite sacrifice, the infinite gift of Calvary, is evidence of God's love and reason for the infinite risk Christ assumed in the Incarnation. If love is the basis of the risk Christ had to face, this would require thinking of him as a free agent, able to make choices based on love. Therefore, how Christ's free will as incarnated Son of God interacted with the Father's will becomes here a necessary ground for investigation. If the Son of God is a free agent, how does the Father interact with him as a human being? How does the Father show love towards the Son? How does God intervene in the life of the human Christ? What are the implications of the relation 'human Christ – divine Father'? Or, more specifically, does divine intervention in the life of human beings, often called 'providence' and surely intended as an expression of his love, entail a risk?

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[433] Thomas Jay Oord, *The Uncontrolling Love of God: An Open and Relational Account of Providence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 154. For a further study of kenosis and of the natures of Christ, especially in the XIX cent. See Thompson, "Nineteenth-Century Kenotic Christology: Waxing, Waning and Weighing of a Quest for a Coherent Orthodoxy"; David Brown, *Divine Humanity Kenosis and the Construction of a Christian Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011).

[434] See Moltmann, *The Crucified God*.

[435] COL, 72.

[436] CTBH, 40.

4.4 Love: Between Providence, Free Will, and Infinite Risk

John Sanders has emphasised a connection between divine providence and a sort of risk in his book *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Providence*. While staying far from Christological, Trinitarian, and Soteriological questions, Sanders affirms that providence is the way God chooses to provide for humanity's well-being and show his love.[437] Sanders highlights the question of free will in God's creation on this conceptual ground. Creatures are created free, and this freedom represents God's love but also openness to risk.[438] He argues that the nature of God's love implies taking risks and being open to the creatures' rejection of his invitation. I agree with the view supported by Sanders and Oord that free creatures may hinder God's plans[439] , but, most of all, I see valuable the concept that love is at the basis of free will and that the rejection of God is implied by such freedom. If love seeks free choice, takes risks, and does not force, then a perfect God cannot absolutely determine everything.

Conversely, the divine loving nature requires creating undetermined creatures, not beings whose actions are guaranteed and over whom God has control. Therefore, God's loving nature is open to the risk of rejection, sin, and deviation from the right. Following this line of reasoning and in contrast to Sanders' view of a risk only projected towards the creation and not the creator, I see it necessary here to see how, instead, the affirmation that God is a "God who risks" affects God himself by placing the creator at risk.

If it is true that, as previously seen, God does not risk failure in creating the world because he is perfect, which means he cannot create the world with imperfections, the freedom he grants to human beings is, in the words of Fiddes, "a *considerable* risk."[440] Even if God is not the author of evil or imperfections, the creation of a free world places on him a responsibility. Moreover, if God's loving nature is open to rejection by human nature, what would this imply for the incarnated Son of God as a human being?

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[437] John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 12.

[438] Ibid., see especially pp. 16, 244.

[439] Ibid, see especially p. 179; see Oord, *The Uncontrolling Love of God,* 135.

[440] Paul Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: DLT, 2000; Lousiville, KY: John Knox Press, 2000), 168.

Eberhard Jüngel (1934-2021) says, "to think God as love is the task of theology."[441] Therefore, theology should be concerned with a God who is love. This statement, 'God is love', should be carefully read without differentiating God and love ontologically. God's being is indeed defined by love.[442] Therefore, in light of White's theology of infinite risk, the Incarnation placed Christ in a position where his life and also his willingness to die, even eternally, become the expression of his being love. Like every other human being, the incarnated Son of God could have chosen freely to refrain from sin or reject the Father's invitation.[443] Authentic love only could have been the guarantor of his choice. This kind of love is free and freely chooses.

However, the notion of Christ's free will has always been problematic. It may be helpful here to make a brief digression and recall the contribution of Maximus the Confessor, endorsed by the Sixth Ecumenical Council, to this issue. Regarding Maximus' treatment of the concept of Christ's will, there are two periods to be distinguished. The point that separates these two periods is the birth of the Monothelite controversy, to which Maximus devoted himself with significant commitment. In the first period, before the controversy, anticipatory elements lean towards the concept of natural will, and others are more consistent towards the gnomic will. The context in which Maximus speaks generically of the human will is in the relationship with the divine will. Here, it may be relevant to highlight that Christ should possess a human will and human agency so that he could be human in all respects. At the same time, the human will of Christ would have been in complete harmony with the will of God the Father as no contradiction or conflict between these wills was imaginable. The absence of contradiction or conflict between Christ's human will and God's will is explained by the fact that Christ's will and action, like all of his human nature, were completely deified. Maximus clarifies this by distinguishing between physical or natural will and gnomic will.[444] Physical or natural

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[441] Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute Between Theisim and Atheism* (London: Bloomsbury - T&T Clark, 2014), 314.

[442] See especially section V.20 titled "The God Who Is Love; On the Identity of God and Love", in Jüüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 314ss.

[443] White believes that there is always a component of choice from the part of human beings in refraining from sin. This free act does not confer merits as it is the acceptance of the grace of God against sin. However, a voluntary refraining from sin guarantees the freedom necessary to be an act of love and obedience towards God.

[444] On the topic of the Christ's two wills, the deification of human nature, and also the *communicatio idiomatum* in Maximus the Confessor see Panayiotis Christou, "Maximus Confessor on the Infinity of Man," in *Maximus Confessor. Actes du Symposium sur Maxime le Confesseur* (Fribourg 2-5 September 1980; ed. F. Heinzer and Chr. Schönborn; Fribourg: Editions Universitaires, 1982); Luigi D. Manca, *Il primato della votontà in Agostino e Massimo il Confessore* (Roma: Armando, 2002); Adam G. Cooper, *The body in St Maximus Confessor: Holy Flesh, Wholly Deified* (Oxford Early Christian Studies; Oxford: OUP, 2005); Melchisedec Törönen, *Union and Distinction in the Thought of Maximus the*

will is that which belongs to all human nature. Gnomic, or 'will to choose',[445] belongs to every single person. If Christ had a 'will to choose', then he would be a simple human being, predisposed to reasoning, doubting and having contradictions.

Since in Christ, however, the human will was completely subordinate to the will of God, one cannot speak of any conflict or contradiction between the two wills: one will was all God together with man, and the other one all man together with the divine. Therefore, according to Maximus, Christ did not possess a gnomic will. In other words, while the natural will answers to the nature of human beings, the gnomic will engages a person in the process of decision. Therefore, since the process of decision presupposes that Christ did not know what to choose or want so that he could deliberate on choices, Christ as both human and divine could not have a gnomic will because this would create an incongruence of his two wills, the divine and the human. Maximus' view became dominant in later Chalcedonian Christianity. Christ was without a human gnomic will as he could never be in a state of ignorance regarding his choices. Any process of decision is considered a weakness within this theological framework.

This view presupposes that even though human will and human action had to be fully present in Christ for him to be a human being in all respects, they are deified so that there may not be a contradiction between the divine and human wills. This position seems to hide a contradiction. How can Christ be totally human and make use of a human will and action without being open to choice? This contradiction seems to become even more evident if one thinks that Maximus believed that the human will of Christ was subordinate to the will of God. Would it then be possible to talk of free will in Christ? If the idea that making a decision would highlight a weakness, in an Aristotelian view, would it not logically follow that Christ would have to assume even the weakest of weaknesses to be truly human? One could ask if it is necessary to have free will to make choices or if, in a way, God himself has free will. God has undoubtedly the ability of a conscious mind to make decisions without being influenced by extraneous factors. In this sense, God is sentient and has a thought; he has

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Confessor (Oxford Early Christian Studies; Oxford: OUP, 2007); Claudio Moreschini, "La persona umana secondo Massimo il Confessore" in *La teologia dal V all'VIII secolo fra sviluppo e crisi: XLI Incontro di Studiosi dell'Antichità Cristiana* (Rome, 9-11 May 2013; Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum 140; Rome: Istituto Patristico Augustinianum 2014), 697-716.

[445] From the Greek γνωμη; choice, intention.

volition. Free will is necessary to make choices. Therefore, it appears that a common concept is thinking that human choices are exclusively for human beings.

Consequently, one is brought to think that Christ, as a human and divine being, could not choose in the same way between good and evil. If the idea Sanders previously presented proposed that divine intervention should ontologically imply risk, why is this risk only external to God himself? In other words, if the nature of God's love requests God himself to run the risk of being rejected by human beings, why would that not be possible for the incarnated Son of God as a human being, i.e. to choose between accepting or rejecting God? Christ needs to have all the free will that every human has, including the choice of rejection. If his way of exercising his will would be in any form different from the rest of humanity, he could not fully represent it.

Evidently, Sanders, like many others, did not consider the possibility that the risk associated with free will may go as far as to affect God's nature or God himself. Even if self-sacrificing love is often at the centre of Christology and Soteriology, the extent of the 'self' in the sacrifice is obscured by a theological view excluding a potential infinite risk. Sanders' perspective merely points to the acceptance or rejection of God's invitation. However, it becomes necessary to think of love and free will as integral elements of Christ's incarnational process and indicators of the risk scenario, even in the frame of a theology of providence.

White understands the value of recognizing God's infinite love as a free action through the lens of the cross. She believes that Christ, as a human being, had to face all the choices every human being has to face.[446] If a gnomic will is integral to the fallen nature of human beings, then Christ should have been exposed to the decisional process everyone needs to follow. Why would one agree with how White understands the free will of Christ? How could the human will of Christ, if gnomic, be in disagreement with the divine one? In White's view, if facing choices is a sign of human weakness, then Christ must find himself at the cross with the decision to be crucified or not. Even if atonement may be understood as happening at the cross, it happens insofar as the cross is understood as something to which Christ in his humanity had to say 'yes' or 'no'. Within the biblical frame of Romans 5, White leans forward to a second-Adam view where Christ faced the same

[446] In this sense, White affirms human free will in matters of salvation in a way that may seem close to Arminian and Methodist tradition, though not denying the role of accepting freely and undeservedly God's saving grace.

options as Adam, though with a fallen nature, and where Adam sinned, Christ did not.[447] This applies to his decision, as Son of God, to both be incarnated and accept his death and follow the will of the Father. In its fullest sense, this has been, for Christ, a free choice.

White writes that "all that was lost by the first Adam will be restored by the second."[448] She adds that Christ had to reach man "where he was," bearing the degeneracy of the human race and humiliating himself to the "lowest depths of human woe, that He might be qualified to reach man and bring him up from the degradation in which sin had plunged him."[449] Therefore, White thinks in a direction opposite to Maximus when she argues that Christ runs an infinite risk in becoming human and accepting the death on the cross. In a way, Christ's human will may not be understood as subordinated to the Father when it comes to Christ's decision to expose himself to the choice of sinning or obeying. Here is where, for White, the price 'paid' in the death of the Son of God, and what that could imply if sin were in the picture, becomes the only way to grasp better what divine love is, who God is and risked to achieve the highest expression of good. In this way, it may seem that White's argumentation presupposes a critique of metaphysics, a post-metaphysical thinking diverging from the Aristotelian idea that the human action has the ultimate goal of achieving the 'highest' good as the end of a process of self-realization, with happiness as the only thing that any human being desires for oneself.

In order to further understand White's 'critique of metaphysics' and the implications of the infinite risk for the relation of Christ and his Father, it is necessary to highlight here that White never elaborates on the infinite risk scenario beyond the person of the divine-human Christ. While she is clear about the implication of the risk assumed by the divine Son of God in the incarnation, i.e. eternal death, she does not say what the consequences of Christ's perdition would have been for the person of the Father. It is necessary, however, to attempt advancing some potential implications of her view.

Let us assume that White would not argue that divinity can indeed succumb to sin. Would not this simply mean that the divinity did not risk anything at all with the Incarnation? If this were true, then God would not be 'offering' his Son for the salvation of the world, as the cross would only be

[447] To read more about White's understanding of the second Adam, see "The Temptation of Christ," RH 28 July 1874, and in "Christ as a Second Adam," in Con.

[448] PP, 67.

[449] "Christ as a Second Adam," Con, 32.

a riskless farce. Conversely, if the divinity did run a risk, it is possible to think that this must be true for all three divine persons. Let us assume that for White, only Christ could have lost his life; would not this challenge God's perfection by and large? Or his unity with the Son? Would God be reliable if only Christ, as the Son of God, should have paid for our sins? Once more, how could divinity as a whole overcome sin if only the Son of God would face the consequences of its transgression?

It is not clear whether an ultimate answer can be given to these questions. However, one possible interpretation of what White's theology implies is that the whole universe,[450] including the Father and the Spirit, would have faced the consequences of Christ's annihilation to a certain degree.[451] If a Godhead dimension needs to be considered, even if White does not discuss the question of the extension of the infinite risk to the whole divinity, her views suggest a movement from the idea of a metaphysical God towards a different kind of incarnated God.

From a Christological perspective, instead, by means of the *communicatio idiomatum,* traditional theology argues that God does not suffer, even less can he die, but in Christ, divinity suffers in the flesh. Traditional theology believes that, while Christ's human and divine natures were in a way both united and also separate, the attributes of one can be applied to the other because of their oneness in his person. This interchange of properties tries to explain the interaction of divinity and humanity in the person of the incarnated divine-human Christ. In this sharing relation, at least in theory, this form of incarnational theology presumes that the Son of God incarnated should be subject to human properties, while his human person may also possess divine attributes. The *communicatio idiomatum* tries to solve the issue of two otherwise mutually exclusive concepts, divine and human. However, it does not succeed completely in solving all issues if it does not envision the full experience of human nature, which is the possibility of eternal death, as the infinite risk would instead imply. White's theology seems to go beyond this established boundary by arguing for a stronger and more symbiotic link of the divine with the human. In fact, if the properties of human nature are not fully assumed by the divine one, then there may not be real human experience. Would White support the idea of an interchange of divine and human nature of the same 'size',

[450] The term 'universe' is here used as referring to the whole creation, which in White's view entails also the creation of other inhabited worlds.

[451] White would never say what those consequences for the whole universe would be. One may be prompted to think that sin and eternal death would be spread all over the universe creating an incomprehensible reality of chaos and evil somehow affecting not only created beings but also the creator.

where the divine may indeed experience 'all' that is human and vice versa? Or would she be more inclined to think of only a one-directional *communicatio proprietatibus humanis,* at least within the soteriological dimension of the divine Christ's incarnated being?

If the *communicatio idiomatum* considers human nature as an incommunicable property of the Son to the other persons of the Godhead, then it may be possible to think that this incommunicability makes the incarnational scenario different for Christ. In other words, this different status may be the space for the human nature of Christ to be lived fully even with the risk of self-loss, the infinite risk. Unfortunately, the *communicatio idiomatum,* though trying precisely to achieve the opposite, fails to extend the full range of human experience to the Son of God incarnated by excluding the risk of eternal perdition. In a way, if it is true that the divine attributes may be predicated of the human person of Christ, the Incarnation is the human reality in which these divine attributes subsist though 'submissive'. A *communicatio proprietatibus humanis* would see the human experience fully translated to the divine, thus allowing for the risk of eternal loss to apply to God as well. Even if White's views are not systematically expressed, her theology of infinite risk ultimately extends beyond the Trinitarian, Christological and Soteriological dimensions to embrace *de facto* a unique theology. In other words, the whole matter has to do with how White thinks about God committing to himself, to God-self, and to salvation in his own eternal being. Ultimately, the question addresses God's essence, which, as previously stated, is love, a love that risks everything for the good of humankind.[452]

White is undoubtedly advocating for a Bible-centred version of Christianity where the concept of infinite love, as the supreme revelation of 'good', should be open to an infinite risk to be indeed the highest good. The only ground for humanity to reach an 'infinite' victory or gain over sin is through

[452] Even if these concepts may not seem a viable theological path or be labelled as an *absurdum theologicum* by mainstream theology, White's infinite risk theology implies the idea that the risk of the Son could extend its consequences to the Father and thus leading, in a way, to a sort of annihilation of God himself. Even if, in the potential scenario of Christ's committing sin, the Father would have not sinned, it is also true that if Christ, as the Son of God, had sinned he would have fallen under the condemnation of the Law; this could not be without consequences for the Godhead as a whole (would the Father's perfection be credible if the Son were not able to keep the divine Law?). However, it must be noted that White never discusses this issue. To add more would be speculating (e.g. Who would condemn the Father? Would he condemn and annihilate himself?). White does not argue for more than the risk for Christ of losing his own life together with humanity. It is indeed difficult to understand how in a Trinitarian deity the Son can bear the penalty the Father would otherwise extract from his creation, but when the distinction between the persons is understood in a non-Trinitarian way, as White seems to suggest, it may become even more complex.

Christ's offer of him-self. It follows that there might be only two choices before every human being, including Christ as such: victory or eternal loss, sin or obedience. She writes that,

> when sinful man can discern the inexpressible love of God in giving His Son to die upon the cross, we shall better understand that it is infinite gain to overcome as Christ overcame. And we shall understand that it is eternal loss if we gain the whole world, with all its pleasure and glory, and yet lose the soul. Heaven is cheap enough at any cost.[453]

The inexpressible love of God is revealed at the cross and through the cross. A proper understanding of the relevance of love within the concept of infinite risk brings an 'infinite gain' and 'infinite victory' over sin. Everyone's rejection, everyone's transgression of the Law, including that of the incarnated Son of God (had it happened), may produce only one possible result: eternal loss.[454] As White would ask, "Could God give us any greater proof of His love than in thus giving His Son to pass through this scene of suffering? And as the gift of God to man was a free gift, His love infinite, so His claims upon our confidence, our obedience, our whole heart, and the wealth of our affections are correspondingly infinite."[455] The infinite love of God is clearly demonstrated in the suffering and death of the Son of God. This is "the infinite gift of God's dear Son."[456] In White's view, the cross is indeed an excellent proof of God's infinite love, but it is the infinite risk he took to save humanity that generates a chain of 'infinite' claims. God's free intervention, or providence, in the universe is the basis of free will choices for all humanity. Free will may not easily be removed from the risk scenario. If humanity was created with the freedom to choose or reject God, and God's intervention may not be deterministic, then it becomes very possible to consider 'risk' as the guarantor of this reality. Without risk, there is no freedom nor love; without a risking God, there may not be a loving God. Risk and love belong together.

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[453] "Temptation of Christ", RH 18 March 1875, para. 7 (republished in Con., Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1971, 78).

[454] If the atonement may be understood as, briefly (and among other definitions), the process of removal of obstacles to the reconciliation with God, mainly sin and disobedience, Christ's death is the way in which the demand of the Law is met with a perfect and sinless life. Salvation is for White an offer; none is saved automatically but by accepting God's grace. Everyone is then faced with the potential risk of losing life eternally if Christ's sacrifice is not sincerely accepted and life is changed in harmony with the Law.

[455] 3T, 369.

[456] "Will a Man Rob God?", RH 16 May 1882, para. 16.

4.5 Risk and Love Belong Together

The giving of God's Son is understood in the Bible as a display of God's love towards humanity. White would express it in various forms in her writings, for example, by saying that "through the cross we learn that the heavenly Father loves us with a love that is infinite."[457] However, her understanding of God's infinite love remains striking, as revealed in the risk Christ ran with the Incarnation. She writes that in his divinity, Christ was "sinless and exalted by nature, he consented to take the habiliments of humanity, to become one with the fallen race. In the nature of man he took the risk of meeting the temptations of the fallen angel, permitting himself to be tried on every point wherewith man was tempted."[458] White affirms that Christ consented to take upon himself the 'habiliments' of humanity, its characteristics, its – figuratively – clothes, life, and existence in the truest sense. He became 'one' with humanity, one with the fallen race in its post-lapsarian state. Therefore, he took the risk implied in facing temptation as a human being: sinning. If it is true that, as John McIntyre (1916-2005) says, "the ultimate criterion by which any christology is to be judged is the nature of the soteriology which it implies or allows,"[459] White's soteriological understanding of Christ is strongly based on the idea that salvation may not be possible if Christ is not "tried on every point wherewith man was tempted." Consequently, in her Christology, the Son of God had to have the same possibility to be tempted and fail in order to save.

When White uses the language of 'infinite love', she intends to describe a type of love beyond human understanding and precisely revealed through the cross. Talking of the apostle Paul, she writes that he received "a revelation of the infinite love of God, as revealed in the death of Christ,"[460] and that one may behold the love of God through the "infinite sacrifice"[461] of the Son. Infinite love and infinite sacrifice are here expressions of the same reality: the infinite risk Christ took to save humanity. This risk is the most authentic expression of God's love.

Following this reasoning, even though Christ was undoubtedly 'sinless', White does not refer to this with the only sense of Christ being by nature without sin, but also in light of his life without an action that could be defined as 'sin.' However, his sinless status was kept throughout his earthly life

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[457] AA, 210.

[458] "The Purpose and Plan of Grace," ST 25 April 1892, para. 5.

[459] John McIntyre, *The Shape of Christology: Studies in the Doctrine of the Person of Christ* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998[2]), 193.

[460] AA, 245.

[461] Ibid., 248.

because, though in the 'habiliments' of humanity, he met and resisted temptations. Nonetheless, if there was a risk, then there was a possibility of failure. On this ground, White writes that "Satan gloried in the opportunity of thus besieging the Son of God. Because he had taken upon him the nature of man, Satan deemed that the victory was certain, and with every malignant device in his power, he strove to overcome Christ."[462] According to White, Satan could attack Christ with the intent of making him commit sin and, therefore, overcoming him. As she writes, Satan and his angels even "triumphed as they discovered that the Son of God had taken upon him the nature of man, and had come to be man's substitute, to engage in the conflict in his behalf."[463] This triumphant reaction resulted from perceiving that overcoming Christ in his assumed human nature was indeed possible.

It is striking to read White's opinion about the surprise at the news that Christ had taken on human nature. According to White, it was a discovery that pleased Satan and his allies as they clearly understood that this made Christ subjected to the risk of falling and being lost forever, as every human being. White seems to be sure that the fallen angels were aware of the infinite risk of the Incarnation. All of this points against the belief that Christ could not sin. Moreover, it clarifies that if Christ had sinned, this would have implied a failure in the plan of redemption and, even more, the victory of Satan over Christ. In White's thought, risking eternal life makes Christ's sacrifice an even greater expression of love. White understands sacrifice as an expression of love and Christ as "the most precious gift of heaven to our world, a gift above all computation."[464] It follows that accepting that God is love means accepting that the Incarnation involves a risk.

It is easy to realize here that this 'risk scenario' is absent and impossible within Trinitarian theology.[465] White's infinite risk theology may then seem to be, generally, incompatible with traditional Christological and Trinitarian views. A non-existent divine Son of God is a total impossibility. White does not believe in a divine person subsisting within a human person, but Christ

[462] "The Purpose and Plan of Grace," ST 25 April 1892, para. 6.

[463] Ibid., para. 7.

[464] CS, 160.

[465] Even if White does not have a Trinitarian view, especially in reference to the union of Father and Son as one indivisible reality, she nevertheless considers the bond between Father and Son as beyond human comprehension and what happens to the Son may also affect the Father. In a way, White's soteriology has in this a point of reconciliation with traditional Trinitarianism.

took humanity into himself.[466] This would mean that Christ was a person, a being (not a divine hypostasis) with two natures, and as White would say it, "in Christ divinity was enthroned in humanity. […] Christ's humanity could not be separated from His divinity."[467]

She expresses this concept, which she calls "the mystery of godliness", with an even stronger statement: "the two expressions human and divine were, in Christ, closely and inseparably one, and yet they had a distinct individuality."[468] White would argue for the possibility of Christ sinning as a human being in both the inseparable character of this union of divine and human natures and in their 'yet' distinctiveness. Then, as the Son of God, he would have also paid the penalty of sin in his divine being. The pre-existing Son of God would have lost his eternal existence, his divinity, along with his humanity. This is remarkably affirmed by White's statement that Christ "became subject to temptation, endangering as it were, His divine attributes. Satan sought, by the constant and curious devices of his cunning, to make Christ yield to temptation."[469] What could be a greater expression of love than Christ's openness to endanger his divine attributes? Does not this mean, in other words, that his divine existence was at risk of extinction?

Thus, White believes that Christ could die a 'permanent' death. This risk reveals the depth of divine love. But, no traditional Christology or Trinity doctrine would ever think of divine love as something that could prompt even the sacrifice of divine attributes and existence to save humanity. Love is undoubtedly a preeminent attribute of God, and it also defines him. It is inexpressible, infinite and remarkably revealed at the cross. In the words of John Stott (1921-2011),

> God's love must be wonderful beyond comprehension. God could quite justly have abandoned us to our fate. He could have left us alone to reap the fruit of our wrongdoing and to perish in our sins. It is what we deserved. But he did not. Because he loved us, he came after us in Christ.

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[466] "By his obedience to all the commandments of God, Christ wrought out a redemption for man. This was not done by going out of himself to another, but by taking humanity into himself," in "The Word made Flesh," RH 5 April 1906, para. 15 (see also ST 26 April 1899). This may not be seen as different from Chalcedonian view. However, while the Chalcedonian teaching presupposes that in the Incarnation human nature was assumed into the divine hypostasis, White does not see the person of Christ as a divine hypostasis, if that may mean the underlying state or substance of God, but as an independent being (not something that stands under; *ousia* with the meaning of 'being').

[467] "Christ and the Law," ST 14 April 1898, para. 6.

[468] "Christ Glorified," ST 10 May, 1899, para. 11. "But although Christ's divine glory was for a time veiled and eclipsed by His assuming humanity, yet He did not cease to be God when He became man. The human did not take the place of the divine, nor the divine of the human. This is the mystery of godliness. The two expressions human and divine were, in Christ, closely and inseparably one, and yet they had a distinct individuality."

[469] Lt 5, 4 January 1900.

> He pursued us even to the desolate anguish of the cross, where he bore our sin, guilt, judgment and death. It takes a hard and stony heart to remain unmoved by love like that. It is more than love. Its proper name is 'grace', which is love to the undeserving.[470]

This incomprehensible love is at the basis of an action that, for Stott, would not be understandable otherwise: the Son of God came to save humanity while he could simply leave it to its fate. It is because of love that in Christ, God saved the world. This love is genuinely grace, love to the undeserving. However, for White, this would be the pursuit of human salvation at the cost of divine perdition if Christ sinned.

Her 'infinite language' represents this particular dimension of God's love. She writes, almost at the end of her life, in 1915, the following reflection about God's love: "How the wondrous provision of the plan of God for the salvation of men widens and exalts our ideas of the love of God! How it binds our hearts to the great heart of infinite love!"[471] White thinks about the cross as the way to understand God, his being love, his love and how humanity is bound to it. Once one understands what the cross implied for the divine Son of God, what risk he had taken in the Incarnation, and what the plan of God for the salvation of humanity entailed, then the love of God appears in its magnitude and infinity.

White's infinite risk theology offers a different framework for understanding the depth of God's love. On this theological insight, redemption is a display of divine love, and the offer of the Son is its most perfect representation. Consequently, the Incarnation is an act of love because Christ took the risk of meeting temptations on the same ground as every human being. As White argues, Christ should have had the same possibility of being tempted, failing, and being lost because only through the cross can one understand that he loves with infinite love.

This risk is the most reliable guarantee of God's love. Therefore, risk and love involve a degree of interdependence. In order to have a genuine love for and enter a relationship with earthly beings, God should hold a degree of interdependence with humanity. One must acknowledge that love includes a form of depending on the other. This may be how to understand *kenosis* as self-giving or

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[470] John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Nottingham: IVP, 2006) 98; see also Gregory Love, *Love, Violence, and the Cross: How the Nonviolent God Saves Us Through the Cross of Christ* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2010). In particular, Love, in the second half of his book, presents five models of how the death of Christ reveals a nonviolent God and the cross is essential to the work of salvation.

[471] "The Mighty and Inspiring Conflict," ST 5 January 1915, para. 20.

self-emptying, where the Son of God takes servanthood. This humble act, or as White would say, "Christ bowed down in unparalleled humility," is the ultimate risk of a self-giving loving Christ. The extension of this 'self' is where Christology does not often dare to go. Can the 'self' offering of God be concretely said to involve the total loss of 'self' in the offer?

This is what White believes when she speaks of infinite love. This self-giving infinite love is also reflected in White's Methodist tradition. In fact, Charles Wesley's song for his conversion "And can it be that I should gain?" exclaims, in one of its stanzas, "Amazing love, How can it be that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?"[472] thus placing a strong emphasis on both the love of God and the inexplicable death of the Son of God. This question, which remains unanswered, may easily back the infinite risk theology of White. In fact, the second verse of the song, "Tis mystery all! Th'Immortal dies!", expresses amazement at what appears to be a paradox, a potentially unsettling notion of a vulnerable Son of God, the death of an immortal God. However, the poetic line referring to the passion of Christ is followed by a third stanza celebrating the Incarnation with reference to the words of Paul to the Philippians, the love of God, and the free will choice to redeem humanity. The 'infinite' language of White finds here a familiar tone in Wesley's words "So free, so infinite His grace; Emptied Himself of all but love, And bled for Adam's helpless race; 'Tis mercy all, immense and free; For, O my God, it found out me." This infinite love and free grace keep puzzling when, in the words of Wesley, one considers that Christ bled for Adam's helpless race, having emptied himself of all but love. This kenotic approach to the sacrifice of the cross tends to portray a God who abandons completely all while keeping only love as his form of representation or identity. As Arthur M. Ramsey (1904-1988) writes, "God is Christlike,"[473] therefore, we see God through Christ. Consequently, only love revealed in Christ is now the way God is made perceivable and available. His passion on the cross is how he revealed himself as 'love.' As Pamela Sue Anderson (1955-2017) says, while thinking of Fiddes' theology, "we know God's love best when seeing the world through

[472] Wesley wrote this song in 1738 to celebrate his personal conversion. See Martin Clarke, "'And can it be:' analysing the words, music and contexts of an iconic Methodist hymn," *Yale Journal of Music & Religion* Vol. 2, No. 1 (2016): 25–52; see also *Hymns and Sacred Poems,* available at the Duke Center for Studies in the Wesleyan Tradition, https://divinity.duke.edu/initiatives/cswt/charles-published-verse (retrieved August 2023); Derek Tidball recalls this song and the words of a sermon of Wesley, "A sense of Christ's love in dying for us must be inculcated as the mainspring and motive for all our obedience", in his book titled *The Message of the Cross: Wisdom Unsearchable, Love Indestructible* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001).

[473] Arthur M. Ramsey, *God, Christ and the World: A Study in Contemporary Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1969), 99.

the pain and passion of God."[474]

If love is the only attribute remaining after Christ emptied himself to incarnate and die, then love is the ruling agent of Christ's decision to accept or reject God, obey or transgress the Law. If, on the one hand, this perfect and divine love may only be perfect, on the other, it may not be perfect if it is not offered freely. Thus, love and risk belong together. If love is the remaining attribute of the kenotic process, love must also be intended as openness to contingency because love is in itself free. If love is at the basis of the sacrifice of 'self', then Christ could not but be free to give all of him-'self' to save humanity. Love and risk are interdependent as the first needs the latter to be truly unrestrained and limitless, while the latter needs the first to be indeed purposeful.

Then, if love and risk find expression in the sacrifice of 'self', Christ's sacrifice is certainly central to White's Christology. The kenotic idea of Christ offering him-'self' is key to White's theology of infinite risk. Even if the concept of self-sacrifice has always been problematic, it cannot be easily done away with. However, I highlight that self-sacrifice for White means much more than what Christianity usually thinks as a sacrifice of 'self', as presented so far. In this direction, a valuable overview of the meaning of sacrifice, more broadly, and self-sacrifice, more specifically, comes from the recent volume *Sacrifice and Modern Thought.* With the title "Sacrifice and the Self" Julia Meszaros presents in her article three conditions for what she calls "the fruitfulness of self-sacrifice", which may shed further light on White's approach to the concept. Meszaros writes that,

> Firstly, the validity of self-sacrifice is tied to a recognition of the human self as an intrinsically relational reality, whose good — and flourishing — is intertwined with that of others. Secondly, self-sacrifice has to be based on, and emerge out of, love. Thirdly, self-sacrifice in the ultimate sense of giving one's life for another can properly take place only in the context of a firm conviction that the good of the human being extends beyond this life and world. These criteria are, I will finally suggest, not only met in Christ's own self-sacrifice on the Cross but *intrinsic*

[474] Pamela Sue Anderson, "Sublimation and Sublime Meaning: Pain and Passion in an Infinite, Intellectual Love of God" in *Within the Love of God: Essays on the Doctrine of God in Honour of Paul S. Fiddes* (eds. Anthony Clarke and Andrew Moore; Oxford: OUP, 2014), 170-184. In this chapter, Anderson highlights and explains the role of sublimation and sublime meaning within the context divine love in the theology of Fiddes; for further reflection of the relation between the crucified Lord and the mystery of God's love in Christ see also Barrett, *The Measure and the Pledge of Love: Reflections on the Cross*, and Iain Hamish Murray, *The Cross: the Pulpit of God's Love* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2008).

to His self-sacrifice.[475]

Meszaros' idea that self-sacrifice is both tied to a relational reality and to love, thus resulting in an event for the good of others, the giving of one's life for another, perfectly fits White's theological framework. White would also argue that the extent of Christ's own self-sacrifice should somehow be considered 'beyond' what this life and world are. As for Meszaros, White supports the idea that self-sacrifice could find its origin in Christ's love and intrinsic relational essence. Within this framework of self-sacrifice as rooted in love, Zachhuber writes, in the same volume, "Christ's sacrifice here is the outpouring of God's perfect love for his creature whose suffering and agony calls him forth to action on their behalf."[476] Consequently, this type of love "is sacrificial because it entwines the lover with those he loves, and God's love is supremely so."[477] Moreover, I suppose, as Meszaros states, self-sacrifice is ultimately the outcome of this love revealed in the offer of one's own life for another, where the good of this action extends beyond life itself. In that case, I cannot highlight enough that White embraces the highest representation of this concept when she inserts the infinite risk in what 'beyond life itself' may mean. Infinite risk and infinite love are thus intrinsic to Christ's self-sacrifice.

Moving a step beyond Meszaros, though using her words, for White, there could not have been self-sacrifice without an offer of self "beyond this life and world" and without including a 'beyond the universe or divinity itself'. In this sense, the concept of self-sacrifice is intertwined with the idea of 'relation'. As Meszaros says, self-sacrifice "properly manifests and builds a bond or relationship"[478] between subjects, the partners in relation. Following the opinion of Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973) on this intersubjectivity,[479] Meszaros comes to a conclusion on which White would very much agree: self-sacrifice "emerges out of and promotes love."[480] This kind of love, according to Meszaros, is a deep concern and will for the good of others, so uniting self and others. Self-sacrifice is thus tied to a love relationship. Moreover, this conceptual ground may well support the idea, as presented by White, that love may not depart from the responsibility of self-annihilation. Meszaros

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[475] Julia Meszaros, "Sacrifice and Self," in *Sacrifice and Modern Thought* (eds. Johannes Zacchuber and Julia Meszaros; Oxford: OUP, 2013), 66-82, (69).

[476] Zachhuber, "Modern Discourse on Sacrifice and its Theological Background," 21.

[477] Ibid.

[478] Meszaros, "Sacrifice and Self," 73.

[479] Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being* (vol. I: *Reflection and* Mystery, Chicago, IL: Henry Regnery Company, 1950; vol. II: *Faith and Reality*, South Bend, IN: St Augustine's Press, 2001).

[480] Meszaros, "Sacrifice and Self," 74.

says that "the rootedness of self-sacrifice in love means that self-sacrifice, like love, can only ever be given freely and from a position of inner resourcefulness, freedom, and plenitude."[481] Thus, Christ's self-sacrifice emerges freely from his inner self as an irresistible force and is based on the ontological reality of his relationship with humanity, even the assumed one in the Incarnation.

Within the framework of White's infinite risk theology, I see it as relevant to highlight that Meszaros recognizes that "self-sacrifice is warranted only where a person recognizes a loving bond with another to be more fundamental to his being than the pursuit of his individual flourishing."[482] If this is a reliable understanding of the relation between love and sacrifice, it follows that Christ recognized his loving bond with humanity as a priority over that of his own self-existence. This may constitute a ground for the acceptance of the risk of his eternal loss. Moreover, it may characterize the life of the incarnated Son of God as truly a movement towards cooperation between the divine and the human, against an idea of individual advantage. Consequently, using Meszaros' words, however, bearing in mind White's concept of risk, self-sacrifice is "a response to the mysteriously compelling impetus of love of another."[483] Thus, this cooperative self-risking sacrifice transcends life and shapes itself as a response to both the other's good and the mysterious, compelling inner love towards the other. This notion of self-sacrifice makes "more explicit the extent to which love for another at times implies a high, though freely chosen, cost."[484]

Therefore, at this stage, it becomes also necessary to consider that this infinite love of God implied a cost proportionate to the value God gave to each soul. This is in line with the idea of relational reality presented above. Self-sacrifice is also sacrifice for the others. White would argue, as it shall be seen in the following chapter, that the infinite risk Christ assumed in the Incarnation came at an infinite cost, freely chosen, because he gave an infinite value to humanity, resulting in an infinite blessing. Within the framework of White's infinite risk theology, it is relevant here to analyse how White keeps applying her language of 'infinite' to what she sees as the cost or value of redemption. This must be done bearing in mind that this 'infinite' language points to the idea that the sacrifice of Christ went 'farther' than what theological concepts such as immutability, indivisibility, and impeccability would consider: it included a costly infinite risk.

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[481] Ibid.

[482] Ibid., 75.

[483] Ibid., 74.

[484] Ibid., 76.

Chapter 5

Infinite Risk and Infinite Value/Cost

White argues that God gave an infinite value to humanity motivated by his love for it, which led to taking the infinite risk to save it. Then, the infinite love of God for humanity is the expression of the great value he gives to each human being, resulting in what White calls an 'infinite blessing.' It is worth noticing the prevalent 'infinite' language she uses to highlight the cost or value of redemption and the semantic field of theological economy that characterises her writing in this regard. This is why she uses terms such as 'value' and 'cost' in connection with the idea of risk.

5.1 The Value and Cost of Redemption

In 1900, while commenting on the parable of the wedding in Matthew 22, White argues that the garment for the feast, pointing to salvation, is provided at infinite cost, though freely offered to every soul.[485] Then, she exclaims, "What could God do for us that He has not done in providing the great supper, the heavenly banquet?"[486] While she explores the meaning of the parable, she emphasises the act of God as something that could not be greater. She rhetorically asks, "What could God do for us that He has not done….?" This is once more pointing to the infinite theology of White, where salvation is the product of an extreme act which greater could not be. In fact, when White talks of the salvation that Christ brought to the reach of all, she says that upon "the cross of Calvary He paid the infinite redemption price for a lost world. His self-denial and self-sacrifice, His unselfish labor, His humiliation, above all, the offering up of His life, testifies to the depth of His love for fallen man."[487] The "infinite redemption price" that Christ paid is revealed in his self-sacrifice and the offering of his life as a testimony to the depth of his love. As White continues, the Incarnation is how Christ came to seek and save the lost. His mission is directed to every sinner and

> He paid the price for all, to ransom them and bring them into union and sympathy with Himself.

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[485] "The wedding garment, provided at infinite cost, is freely offered to every soul. By the messengers of God are presented to us the righteousness of Christ, justification by faith, the exceeding great and precious promises of God's word, free access to the Father by Christ, the comfort of the Spirit, the well-grounded assurance of eternal life in the kingdom of God." COL, 317.

[486] Ibid., 317.

[487] 5T, 603.

> The most erring, the most sinful, were not passed by; His labors were especially for those who most needed the salvation He came to bring. The greater their need of reform, the deeper was His interest, the greater His sympathy, and the more earnest His labors. His great heart of love was stirred to its depths for the ones whose condition was most hopeless and who most needed His transforming grace.[488]

As it may be noted, terms such as 'price', 'ransom', and 'paid' are all strictly connected with words expressing her infinite concept of salvation, such as 'depths', 'deeper', and 'greater'. All of this serves to highlight the value Christ gave to every sinner. This language comprises superlatives, extremes, and opposites, pointing to the sinner as 'the most erring', 'the most sinful', 'most needed', and 'most hopeless'. It should be read in combination with the other terms pointing to Christ's attitude and action towards the sinner, like 'deeper interest', 'greater sympathy', 'most earnest labors', and, finally, 'great heart of love'.

Following the same line of thought, White is sure that human beings are "Christ's property, purchased by Him at an infinite price, bound to Him by the love that He and His Father have manifested for them."[489] This perspective joins together concepts such as 'property', 'purchase', and 'price', proper to White's metaphoric language of economy so far. Moreover, it connects this economy dimension to the love of God manifested by both the Father and the Son. Thus, the price paid by Christ is an 'infinite' one.

In 1894, White writes that Calvary testifies to the value of human life, which "has been purchased for you at infinite cost."[490] She clearly portrays the value of life by saying that it is precious. Thus, Christ's sacrifice is central to the understanding of the value of a soul. This is in line with a previous statement dated 1888, where White writes that "one soul is of infinite value; for Calvary speaks its worth."[491] White consistently highlights, in her writings, the 'infinite value' of human life. In this sense, White suggests something not foreign to all Christological and soteriological concepts, that is, the comprehension that "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son" (John 3:16). Thus, Calvary is the expression of God's limitless and incomprehensible love. However, White

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[488] Ibid., 603.

[489] 7T, 260.

[490] Lt 51, 9 August 1894 (to Nellie, a young lady contemplating marriage, Norfolk Villa, Prospect St. Granville, N.S.W.).

[491] "The Necessity of Labor," RH 13 March 1888, para. 9.

understands that this implies thinking of Calvary as an infinite, limitless sacrifice where even eternal death could be a reality. This is where she goes beyond mainstream theology.

As a clear example of common Christological interpretations of the death of Christ, a recent book with the evocative title *The High Cost of a Free Gift: The Humiliation of Jesus*, mainly directed to a church audience like the writings of White, expands on the 'economical' idea of the free gift of salvation. Its author, Kermit Taylor, highlights the high price Christ paid so that humanity could be saved. Therefore, salvation is not without a high cost to God himself. With a very Christocentric approach, Taylor says that Christ, as the Son of God, loved and valued humankind to the point of "being willing to squeeze the immensity of His divinity into the minuteness of humanity, becoming a man Himself to die for our sins."[492] Therefore, all are compelled to recognize their value "in the eyes of God the Father and be eternally grateful for Jesus' humble and costly sacrifice."[493] While discussing whether Christ had to give up any part of his divinity in the Incarnation, Taylor develops a theanthropic understanding of the person of Christ that, however, follows the general belief that he could not sin because of his divine nature. In other words, he holds the idea that there has been a sort of dominance of the divine nature over the human one that made Christ sinless, in line with mainstream Christological doctrines.

In this sense, White's Christology departs from this conceptual ground to explore a theanthropic person of Christ where the tendency to attribute human characters to divinity is brought to its extremes, to the point of seeing the 'anthropos' influencing the 'destiny' of the 'theos'. Anyway, Taylor rightly argues that to better understand what salvation costs to Christ, one should understand the value of a soul before God. In this direction, White argues that the infinite cost paid by Christ in risking his eternal life is proportionate to the infinite value he gives to every soul. She confirms this by saying that "Jesus gave His life for the life of the world, and He places an infinite value upon man."[494] The concept of 'life for life' is here strikingly remarked. Consequently, Christ's sacrifice evidences the infinite value he places on human beings. This level of dependence between the life of the Son of God and that of humanity is implied in the White's 'infinite' theological language. Christ did not come to save the world by offering a life somewhat different in essence. The Incarnation is

[492] Kermit Taylor, *The High Cost of a Free Gift: The Humiliation of Jesus* (Meadville, PA: Christian Faith Publishing, 2020), 50.
[493] Ibid.
[494] CS, 136.

where he truly assumes humanity in its fullest sense by also risking his eternity so that human life would appear of infinite value. 'Life for life', as White expresses, has a profound meaning in her infinite risk theology. It is not simply pointing to a broad concept of Christ's death but a true Christological affirmation that Christ indeed shared the destiny of humanity, risking his own existence. This will become even more evident in the following sections. However, it remains relevant to continue analysing here how White emphasises the value/cost of human salvation.

In 1905, White's most comprehensive publication on health and healthful living, *The Ministry of Healing*, highlights the value of a soul to God by urging, parenetically, each believer to think about what Christ did on the cross. Emphasising the potentiality of each individual to accomplish much if they attempt much, she sadly notes that "thousands pass through life as if they had no great object for which to live, no high standard to reach. One reason for this is the low estimate which they place upon themselves. Christ paid an infinite price for us, and according to the price paid He desires us to value ourselves."[495] Once more, the 'economic' metaphor is apt to vividly place at the same level the infinite price paid by Christ and the infinite value of each human being. With the adverb 'according', White equalises the value of human beings with the infinite cost of salvation, thus urging the believers to overcome low self-esteem and achieve higher goals in life. As I have remarked on previous occasions, White's Christological statements are veiled within writings addressing church or personal issues in most cases. Her missional approach is the space for her theology. She writes for her church and to her church members.

Similarly, however, in the educational context, a few years later, her book *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students* highlights the importance of education to understand the value of Christ's sacrifice. She writes that education is essential and "leads to a knowledge of the value that God has placed upon mankind. The students in our schools are to be taught that they are of value in the sight of God, that they have been bought with an infinite price. They should be made to realize the importance of putting to a right use every faculty of the being."[496] Even in the context of education, she never fails to inscribe it into a soteriological perspective where the value of a person is measured by the cross. Therefore, the value God placed upon humanity transcends human intellect.

[495] MH, 291.
[496] CT, 451.

Understanding the infinite cost involved in the sacrifice of the Son of God leads to a better sense of one's personal value before him.

From the Incarnation to the grave, Christ paid a high price and ran a terrible risk because he placed an infinite value on those who trusted in his sacrifice. From his glory to his death, White thinks of a descending movement implying a non-return outcome if Christ had sinned. Considering this conceptual hermeneutical framework, it becomes evident that the love of Christ towards humanity is described with the language of 'infinite'. Christ was willing to lay aside not only his glory but his own life to endure all possible consequences of the Incarnation. God, wrapped in humanity and veiled behind the scenes of human performance, paid the infinite cost, a cost with no limitation and no return if he had failed in his humanity. His divine life becomes the measure to value human life. Consequently, the infinite risk is also the means to determine the value God gave to the redemption of humanity. He was willing to lose all to save all those who may believe in him. He gave all of himself out of love, risking all to save the lost.

White's concept of 'infinite value' becomes even more vivid when she compares it to the richness of the world as follows, "[t]he wealth of earth dwindles into insignificance when compared with the worth of a single soul for whom our Lord and Master died. He who weigheth the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance, regards a human soul as of infinite value."[497] To emphasise the concept of infinite value, White links it directly to the death of Christ as an element of comparison. In this way, infinite value and infinite risk are joined in the event of the death of Christ. The concept of infinite value is strengthened by the terms "Lord" and "Master" to point to the excellent and high position that Christ possesses, especially if read along with the use of the adjective "single" to address the value of even only one human being. "Worth" and "value" are used within the comparative frame of the hyperbolic statement about Christ weighing mountains and hills in a balance. White skillfully uses this language to argue for the infinite value of a single soul against the greatness of mountains and hills; all the wealth of this earth becomes insignificant.

White's Christology finds expression through a language enriched by an economy vocabulary. This is why she often remarks on the importance of understanding what Christ has done to save humanity. This is particularly evident, for example, in a letter to a young immigrant, when she tells him, "you are highly favored in that you have been regarded as of so great value that God has made

[497] GW92, 92.

you His by paying an infinite ransom for your freedom."[498] Every human being has a great value for God. Everyone is highly favoured because God, and in this sense, it means Christ, has paid an infinite price or a ransom to offer freedom. The language of 'infinite' intersects here with that of 'economy' to establish a precise link between the life of God and that of humanity. God has given the most precious thing he possesses in exchange for human life: his own life.

5.2 The Economy of Infinite Risk

White's idea of ransom suggests atonement theology. An illustrative instance highlighting the affinity of her language with atonement doctrines can be found in a later work of Denys E. H. Whiteley's (1914-1987) exploration of Paul's theology of atonement, which proves to be an interesting contribution to this context.[499] He argues that God hates sin, and only its abolition can be the right solution. How can sin be propitiated? The answer is in Christ's death. Christ "deals with sin, not by throwing a cloth over the eyes of God, but by setting us, at the cost of his own life, in a relationship within which sin can be done away."[500] This relationship with God is restored at the cost of Christ's life. In a way, Whiteley strictly connects the concept of cost to that of sin. Sin may not be "done away" without a cost. Whether Christ ransomed humanity from sin or death, or if he suffered the penalty instead of humanity or bought it out of the slavery of sin, the concept of buying one's release is implied. Commenting on the verse of Mark 10:45 about the death of Christ as a ransom,[501] Whiteley suggests that a possible interpretation, amongst others, is that "just as men are freed from slavery by the payment of a ransom, Christ freed us from sin and from death at the cost of his own life. He died instead of (αντί) us in the sense that but for his death we should have perished."[502] It becomes clear that the crucial element of the atonement picture, or the ransom metaphor, is anyway the cost implied in the redemption of the world. With "his own life", in the words of Whiteley, Christ bought our freedom. Moreover, Christ died instead of (αντί) us. If it were

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[498] Lt 11, 26 October 1893, para. 33 (8LtMs; 'Dear Eric'). A letter to a young immigrant to America, named Eric Caro, on the 26 October 1893, to help this young New Zealander to take up seriously the task of forming a Christian character.

[499] For further studies see also Lewis S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (vol. 3; Dallas, TX: Dallas Seminary Press, 1971), 91, especially on the question of the value of Christ's death in propitiation, redemption, and reconciliation.

[500] Denys E. H. Whiteley, "St. Paul's Thought On The Atonement," *The Journal of Theological Studies,* New Series, Vol. 8, No. 2 (OUP; October 1957): 240-255, (esp. 255).

[501] "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

[502] Whiteley, "St. Paul's Thought On The Atonement," 252.

not for his death there would not be salvation. According to Whiteley, Paul believes that "Christ made salvation possible for us at the great cost of his own life [...]."[503]

Similarly expressed, White's concept of ransom primarily serves to convey the substantial cost associated with salvation, along with illustrating the reciprocal exchange between the divine and human lives. Nothing less than his very life, as the life of God, could save humanity. Consequently, the infinite risk could be regarded as the potential scenario of the death of Christ. In White's mind, without risk, there is no true sacrifice; without risk, there is no true gift; without risk, there is no actual exchange of lives, no real ransom; life for life and death for death. As White puts it, by warning against false ideas on the justification by faith in Christ, "Eternal life is an infinite gift."[504] As this gift is infinite, in White's words, it is placed outside the possibility of "earning it, because it is infinite. It must necessarily be a gift. As a gift, it must be received by faith, and gratitude and praise be offered to God."[505] There is no other way of understanding salvation if not by the word "gift". But "gift" points directly to the question of the value it possesses. Humanity can do nothing to pay for it, nor can it be earned through any human effort. White does not doubt that this is how salvation should be understood. It is "necessarily" the way to interpret the value of human life. Infinite value, infinite cost, infinite blessing, infinite ransom, and now infinite gift all point to the same salvific dimension in which the infinite risk plays the greatest and uniting role in the picture.

The inquiry into this salvific dimension within White's theological framework is intricately tethered to the assessment of the significance attributed to the death of Christ. In the book *The Atoning Death of Christ*, Ronald Wallace (1911-2006) extensively explores questions related to the value of Christ's death within the theological framework of atonement and reconciliation. While Wallace may not engage directly with White's theology, recognizing parallels in his arguments with White's infinite language proves valuable. This observation not only provides further ground to interpret White's infinite risk theology but also enhances the understanding of the explicit correlations between the reconciliation process and the associated 'cost.' White effectively establishes this link by equating the cost of human life with the infinite risk undertaken by Christ in the Incarnation. While commenting on 2 Corinthians 5:17-21,[506] Wallace argues that human

[503] Whiteley, "St. Paul's Thought On The Atonement," 240.

[504] "Danger of False Ideas On Justification By Faith," Ms 36, np. 1890, para. 28 (6LtMs, 147-148).

[505] Ibid.

[506] "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is,

response to God's appeal is "possible only because of a reconciling act of God as wonderful as a new creation, and infinite in its cost."[507] It is worth noticing the use of the language of "infinite", which is crucial to White's Christology. At the same time, Wallace's point of reference for the grandeur of the work of reconciliation is the creation itself. The reconciling act of God is "infinite in its cost", comparable to a re-creation.

In this direction, White's infinite theology has God's life at its centre. All gravitate around the idea that what God has given in offering his life at the risk of eternal loss offers an 'estimated' value of the love of God towards humanity. Therefore, the new life of humanity is, in a way, paradoxically the product of the death of divinity. If the value or cost of a soul may ever be calculated, it should be tantamount to the very life of God. If infinite is the life of God, so infinite is the value of a soul. Hence, the infinite risk is the only option available to God to save humanity on the cross. This unique risk and all its outcomes have the same 'infinite' common denominator, including the gift of eternal life.

Fiddes's conceptualization of the nature of love significantly enriches this discourse here, elucidating how God's love serves as the measure of humanity's value within the interpretive framework of this investigation into White's theology of infinite risk. Fiddes's insights not only offer valuable perspectives on God's love but also reinforce the interpretive exploration of White's view on the worth of humanity and Christ's willingness to risk his eternal existence. While expounding on the notion that genuine love transcends calculations or merit, Fiddes delves into the concept and practice of forgiveness, signalling the love that should exist among human beings as a reflection of the love in which God lives and acts. Fiddes contends that "we need to be valued for who we are", and our needs are satisfied as "an unmerited gift precisely as we bestow value on others by our unconditional love of them."[508] According to Fiddes, the essence of being valued for one's intrinsic self aligns with an unconditional love that is, most of all, an unmerited gift. In the words "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son" (Jn 3:16) one may foresee the infinite value God gave to humanity by placing it at the same level as his. The Father's profound love, epitomized

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in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

[507] Ronald Wallace, *The Atoning Death of Christ* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1997), 34.

[508] Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity*, 213.

through the gift of his Son, reveals the attribution of infinite value bestowed upon humanity, aligning it with the divine.

How much God was willing to pay may give a sense of the value of human life for him. The fact that the Son of God accepted the consequences of sin in its fullest sense, in light of White's infinite risk theology, tells of the great value God gave to those whom he came to save. Seeking to save humanity meant that God came to it in Christ, but, in the words of Wallace, behind this coming, there lie "the costly acts of God turning to us and giving himself to us in his own mind and heart. In Christ, God turns to man before man turns to God. God reconciles himself to man before he reconciles man to himself."[509] This movement towards humanity is a costly act that is constituted by the giving of God's life or, as Wallace says, of "his own mind and heart." This turning of God towards humanity anticipates any human response.

Following this reasoning, I agree with Wallace that the death of Christ constitutes the offer of God himself, mind and heart. In line with White, I would not leave out of the picture the idea that God's life may also imply more than a 'moral' commitment on the part of God or the excruciating suffering of his death. What does that mean when one says that God gave himself, mind and heart? Does it mean God could die forever, as White would argue? Wallace also says that the "death of his Son is an act of expiation, fearful in the implications of its necessity, and costly and bitter in its fulfilment."[510] However, how fearful are the implications of Christ's death? How costly and bitter has it indeed been? According to Wallace, the cross is a revelation of God's love that invites to understand and appreciate his work of salvation, its cost and purpose, as a revelation of God himself.[511] But, if White is correct that the cross meant a risk for the life of God himself, does not this open a new way of interpreting Christ's death? Does not this imply rethinking God himself?

It is hardly deniable, as Wallace claims that the cross is a revelation of God's love and of God himself. White's infinite risk theology then serves to understand God's self-revelation from a different perspective. In other words, postulating an eternal death of God makes the eternal life of human beings a far greater gift, indeed fearful and costly. As Wallace says, Christ "could only appear

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[509] Wallace, *The Atoning Death of Christ*, 36.

[510] Ibid., 39.

[511] Ibid., 45, "Our discussion of the cross as a revelation of God's love has come almost at the end of our discussion of its other central aspects. For it is through his work that God chiefly reveals himself, and we must first try to understand and appreciate his work - its purpose, its cost, its lavishness, its beauty, its effectiveness - so that we can interpret it as a revelation of God himself."

to the world as one who went about saying 'Your sins are forgiven' (John 7:4-5; Mark 2:5). Only on Calvary would people begin to see what that word really meant and cost."[512] Therefore, if only on Calvary, one can really see the meaning of the word 'forgiveness' and understand its cost, would White's infinite risk scenario shed light on the meaning and cost of the death of God? Consequently, what could have happened on Calvary if Christ had sinned? What about the gospel story of the resurrection? What about the stone placed to close the tomb of Christ? The following section will try to answer these and other questions while progressing in a close analysis of the Christological implications of the concept of 'infinite risk'.

5.3 Could the Tomb Remain Closed?

As Schwartz writes, "the disciples did not expect anything decisive to happen after Jesus' death."[513] Within the Gospel narrative, nobody was actually expecting to find the tomb empty and even more Christ alive. None was ever thinking about the meaning of the death of Christ from the perspective of his natures. They all believed that the tomb would have been the end of Christ's life, as for every other human being. The paradox is that what they believed, a closed tomb and a dead Christ, is what most Christological views almost always deny.

In the act of redeeming humankind from sin, White realizes that the divinity did not only offer the Son of God but allowed him to partake fully of human nature. Consequently, a set of questions may once again be raised, which are *de facto* strictly connected to one another: What does White understand with full participation in human nature? If Christ had sinned, what would be the consequences? Would, or could, he suffer an eternal death? Or, would he continue to exist as a God if he had died only in his human nature? Could he die only in his human nature? Would the Son of God be separated eternally from the Father? And what would that separation mean? If he could continue existing as a God, what would the implications be of his sinful existence as a man upon his divine nature, the universe, and the Godhead? Would divinity be separated forever from humanity? Or would the imperfect human life of Christ destroy the perfection of the divine life? Speculation is a genuine danger; daring to answer most of these questions assertively would always be a risk.

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[512] Ibid.

[513] Schwarz, *Christology*, 97.

Nevertheless, White directly answers two crucial questions that somehow underline all of the previous: What would have happened to Christ if he had sinned? Could the tomb remain closed and Christ dead? White has a clear-cut answer regarding the risk implied in Christ's Incarnation and sacrifice. This section intends to analyse her response and expand on her concept of Christ taking an 'infinite risk'.

White's answer to the above-mentioned main questions is straightforward. She writes in 1893, in reference to Christ, that "if one single sin had tainted His character the stone would never have been rolled away from the door of His rocky chamber, and the world with its burden of guilt would have perished."[514] Only one single sin, according to White or, as she writes elsewhere, even the conscious denial of his divinity "would leave a stain upon his humanity"[515] and would have meant much more than what may be comprehended. Christ would not even be resurrected. The tomb would have remained closed. Only a single sin would not have seen the Gospel telling the story of the resurrection. Or, probably, there would not have been a Gospel. To save humanity, Christ was willing to forfeit his pre-existence, divinity, and eternal existence. He was aware that he could sin and fail his redemptive mission. He could keep his deity only by remaining faithful, loyal, and sinless. The contrary would have meant the incomprehensible loss of his divinity and existence. The implications and depth of God's sacrifice for humankind can barely be understood.

White has a clear understanding of the concept of infinite risk. However, many more questions may be raised beyond those previously mentioned that may not find an answer in White's Christology. She does not elaborate further beyond the point of the cross. It cannot be known how the eternal death of Christ would impact the Father and the Godhead, nor the universe, and how the Father could possibly feel the loss of his only Son. How could the Father leave the tomb closed? This throws the human finite mind into the realm of infinite divine wisdom, left with no answers.

After writing about the fact that the deity could be lost if Christ had been unfaithful, in 1899, White writes a statement that follows and expands on the hermeneutical reasoning sketched earlier regarding the 'closed tomb.' In the same line of the idea that the stone would never have been

[514] "If One Sin had Tainted Christ's Character," Ms 81, 1893 ("Diary entry for Sunday 2 July 1893"), para. 11.

[515] "When Jesus was asked the question, Art thou the Son of God? He knew that to answer in the affirmative would make his death certain; a denial would leave a stain upon his humanity," Ellen G. White, *Redemption Or The Sufferings Of Christ His Trial And Crucifixion* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1877) 47.

rolled away from the door of the sepulchre if Christ had sinned, she writes that "In the grave Christ was the captive of divine justice. To the Judge of the universe, He had made Himself responsible for the transgression of the law."[516] If Christ had sinned, the grave would have been the place where divine justice and wrath would have come upon Christ as it came upon Adam. Christ would have remained captive of the tomb without hope. The risk was taken in making himself responsible for the transgression of the Law of God.[517] Therefore, when White talks of 'infinite risk', she definitely refers to a closed tomb without resurrection. Consequently, the human race would have lost all hope. Christ and all humans would have shared the same fate: eternal death.

A few years earlier, in 1892, White pens an even stronger statement. She says that "Christ could not see through the portals of the tomb. Bright hope did not present to Him His coming forth from the grave a triumphant conqueror, or tell Him of the Father's acceptance of his sacrifice. All He could realize during this time of amazing darkness was the heinousness of sin that was laid upon Him, and the horror of its penalty, death."[518] For White, as divinity is hidden in humanity, Christ, as a human being, could not perceive the outcome of the sacrifice. As White puts it, Christ could not see beyond the portal of death. The cross was a time of darkness that questioned every belief. Christ could only feel the heinousness of sin and its penalty: death. This concept leads to the understanding that once divinity entered humanity, humanity had a specific and 'leading' role in the sacrifice of the divine Son of God. Humanity had a preeminent role in redemption because it was 'in' this nature that Christ overcame sin.

White strongly remarks on this reality when she says that Christ "feared that sin was so offensive in the sight of his Father that their separation was eternal. The temptation that his own Father had forever left Him, caused that fearful cry from the cross, 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?'"[519] Once again, this seems to suggest that Christ's human nature, paradoxically, had a sort of 'predominance' over the divine one. Thus, salvation is indeed the outcome of the victory of Christ in his human nature while united to the divine one. But, Christ feared that the offensive nature of sin could have caused an eternal separation from his Father. The questioning, fearful cry on the cross, 'My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?', points to the risk taken at the cross. Christ

[516] "The Law Revealed in Christ," ST 15 November 1899, para. 6.

[517] Reference is here made to the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:2-17.

[518] "The Great Sacrifice," BE 15 September 1892, para. 2.

[519] Ibid.

was tempted to believe that his Father had left him forever. From the Incarnation to Calvary, his life has been lived under the risk of disobedience, and the cross was the ultimate place to reveal it. Both his life on earth as the incarnated Son of God and his death on the cross are integral to the infinite risk he took to save humankind.

White does not express further the meaning of this separation in this statement.[520] But, the subsequent question follows logically: would this mean for Christ an eternal loss and the sharing of the condemnation determined for every sinner? Death seems to be the logical consequence. If the thought of the dying Christ was directed towards the potential inefficacy of the sacrifice (due to sin), this makes it possible to believe that Christ could have lost his eternal existence and that he felt this as a potential outcome. If he had sinned, a likely risk scenario would be that of Christ ceasing to exist. This concept seems to be implicit in these previous statements of White.

The possibility of Christ going out of existence directly challenges the general understanding of Christ's sacrifice among mainstream theologies. When it is believed that Christ could not sin and his life was not at stake, the perspective is totally different. God's love towards humanity becomes more tangible and real when, instead, there is a possibility for Christ to yield to temptation and forfeit his existence. Christ's death becomes indeed the greatest of the revelation of God, and his love appears beyond human and finite understanding. It is, therefore, the possibility of a closed tomb, not the day of resurrection, the true victory over sin and the sign of God's love for humanity. Being willing to forfeit his existence may become the core of his love.

Certainly, many theologians are not comfortable with this level of 'full humanity' endorsed by White. Even the deepest kenotic Christology would probably not reach the point of believing that

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[520] For further studies on the meaning of the separation advanced by the cry of dereliction see Randall Buth, "The Riddle of Jesus' Cry from the Cross: the Meaning of ηλι ηλι λαμα σαβαχθανι (Matthew 27:46) and the Literary Function of ελωι ελωι λειμα σαβαχθανι (Mark 15:34)" in *The Language Environment of First Century Judaea* (ed. Randall Buth and R. Steven Notley; Leiden: Brill, 2014). In the words of Calvin, that cry manifested "the terrible torments of a condemned and lost man," Calvin, *Institutes,* II, XVI, 10. Calvin has been the author of many volumes, but the *Institutes* may well reflect the whole career of Calvin. Among the best critical editions of the *Institutes*: Peter Barth and Wilhelm Niesel (eds.), *Joannis Calvini Opera Selecta*.
It is within this perspective that White perceives in that cry an "overpowering anguish," DA, 713, because he could not see an open tomb or his Father's acceptance. As Voorwinde states it "This separation between the Father and the Son is one of the most impenetrable mysteries of the entire Gospel narrative," Stephen Voorwinde, "The Compassionate King," in *Jesus' Emotions in the Gospels* (New York, NY: T&T Clark International, 2011), 56. Thus, the cross with its cry of dereliction still raises questions, perplexities, and difficulties. Ultimately, it is an expression of the tension between the incarnated Son of God and his Father.

Christ could die for eternity because of his assumed human nature.[521] But, White believes that the Son of God was subject to sin and death in taking human nature. In other words, sin could have annihilated him also as God. The question is, therefore, beyond the only 'failure' of the history of salvation. The human nature assumed in the Incarnation would have died forever together with the divine one. Against the general New Testament belief in the resurrection, this must only be true within the framework of a successful and effectual sacrifice on the cross. The opposite would have made void the hope of any eternal life.

The idea that Christ could allow himself to die in humanity as a divine person is incomprehensible and intriguing. The fact that he could have rendered himself incapable of being alive again is profound and destabilising. Several difficult questions still arise and add to many more, for which there are no direct and documented answers in the Bible or White's writings. Was Christ's status in the grave the same as every other person? But, most of all, what about his divine nature in the tomb? As he was lifeless and, therefore, unconscious, would he 'need' the Father's call to experience life again? How does that integrate the Johannine affirmation, "I lay down my life in order to take it up again,"[522] which seems to point to a self-awakening? Was Christ in a condition of inability and dependence on the Father, which requires, as every human being, an external agency to be resurrected?[523]

White does not answer these questions directly. However, within the frame of her infinite-risk theology, she argues about the condition of the divinity in death. She talks about the condition of the Son of God in death, if he had sinned, by openly admitting the death of the divinity. She also speaks of the status of the divinity in death in the successful outcome of the sinless sacrifice as follows,

> Jesus said to Mary, 'Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father.' When he closed his eyes in death upon the cross, the soul of Christ did not go at once to Heaven, as many

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[521] On kenoticism, see Alister E. McGrath, *The making of modern German Christology: 1750-1990* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994); Evans, *Exploring kenotic Christology: the self-emptying of God*; David R. Law, *Kierkegaard's Kenotic Christology* (Oxford: OUP, 2013); Schwarz, *Christology*; McIntyre, *The Shape of Christology*.

[522] John 10:17 "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again."

[523] "The soldiers see him removing the stone as he would a pebble, and hear him cry, Son of God, come forth; Thy Father calls Thee. They see Jesus come forth from the grave, and hear Him proclaim over the rent sepulcher, 'I am the resurrection, and the life.' As He comes forth in majesty and glory, the angel host bow low in adoration before the Redeemer, and welcome Him with songs of praise." DA, 779.

believe, or how could his words be true – 'I am not yet ascended to my Father?' The spirit of Jesus slept in the tomb with his body, and did not wing its way to Heaven, there to maintain a separate existence, and to look down upon the mourning disciples embalming the body from which it had taken flight.[524]

A number of elements of this statement are worth underlining. White talks of the soul of Christ, who did not go to Heaven, as confirmed by his words to Mary Magdalene.[525] She adds "the spirit of Jesus," thus referring to the previous concept of soul, remained in the tomb sleeping. She is probably using the term 'sleeping' in a sense close to the idea of the sleep of death. Moreover, it must be highlighted that the spirit remained united to the body as it could not maintain a separate existence. This aligns with White's understanding of soul, or spirit, as that energy of life or breath of life blown into human nostrils at creation,[526] not as an independent and immortal entity. Most of all, according to White, it is reasonable to believe that the natures of Christ, in a sense, are bound together even in death. As White follows, "all that comprised the life and intelligence of Jesus remained with his body in the sepulchre; and when he came forth it was as a whole being; he did not have to summon his spirit from Heaven. He had power to lay down his life and to take it up again."[527] Therefore, Christ was truly dead, and all of what comprised his life was in the tomb, including his divine nature. Resurrection implied the coming forth of a "whole being." All that his life included waited in the grave until the resurrection.

In the book *Desire of Ages,* White talks of the resurrection by giving a clue to the question of the need to be resurrected against the inner capacity of Christ to raise himself. This may probably point again to the condition of the divine-human nature of Christ at death. She writes that,

When the voice of the mighty angel was heard at Christ's tomb, saying, Thy Father calls Thee, the Saviour came forth from the grave by the life that was in Himself. Now was proved the truth of His words, 'I lay down My life, that I might take it again. . . I have power to lay it down,

[524] "The women at the tomb," 3SP, 203.
[525] John 20:17 "Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"
[526] Genesis 2:7 "then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being."
[527] "The women at the tomb," 3SP, 203.

and I have power to take it again.' Now was fulfilled the prophecy He had spoken to the priests and rulers, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up' (John 10:17, 18; 2:19).[528]

On the one hand, Christ needed the voice of the Father to be resurrected. Oppositely, he had the power in his person to raise himself. Does this point to his divine-human nature? White does not develop it, but it is reasonable to think in this direction. It is possible to understand this condition as to the human nature in need of being resurrected and the divine nature capable of giving life back to itself. It is like to say that the Son of Man needed to be called so that the 'sleepy' (perhaps 'dormant') Son of God could use his own divinity to awaken. Such an endeavour to comprehend the coexistence of the two natures may be a futile and inherently human pursuit specifically limited by linguistic expression. However, in this exploration of Christ's resurrection, particularly in pondering the intricate dynamics and interplay between the voice of the Father and Christ's intrinsic power in the resurrection, there is inherent value. Despite the potential for this theological inquiry to transcend the explicit discussions found in White's writings and occasionally traverse into the construction of broader doctrinal concepts, its significance lies in its contribution to contextualizing and comprehending her theological perspectives.

Thus, advancing in the examination of White's views on the resurrection of Christ, contextualized here within the framework of a sinless sacrifice, what would have happened if the Father had not called him? While Christ was in the tomb, he was in an unconscious status like every human being. He was simply dead. He needed the Father's call to wake. Then, as his life has been spotless, he could raise himself by means of his divinity. This call seems to be compulsory. The situation would have been different if Christ had sinned: not a Father's call and a closed tomb. Indeed, this is beyond imagination. However, White is clear on the potential risk scenario. She does not doubt that Christ's divine life was at risk with his human one. She also clearly affirms that a call from God the Father was required for Christ to awake. As previously said, White's understanding of the Incarnation is one of a blending of divine and human nature, even more symbiotic than in other theological views.

In summary, the judgment of his Father could keep Christ in that tomb. If the Father had found his Son guilty of sin, it is logical to assume that he would not have called him back to life. Christ would have shared the destiny of humanity. Christ was buried "in that stony prison house as a prisoner of divine justice, and he was responsible to the Judge of the universe. He was bearing the

[528] DA, 785.

sins of the world, and his Father only could release him."[529] Christ had to pass through the judgment of his Father. Justice itself kept him prisoner. Had he sinned, that stony prison could have been the end of his life. White describes Christ as a "prisoner of divine justice […] responsible to the Judge of the universe." That divine justice could only find him spotless if he had lived a perfect and sinless life. In this case, therefore, White highlights once more that only the Father could release him. Without being called, Christ could not have raised himself. Only God the Father could release him from death. Christ was then dependent on someone other than himself, his Father, to be raised from the grave. This could once more highlight the dominant role of human nature within the mystery of the Incarnation.

This is hard to understand. Any Christological discourse implying a possibility of death for the divine person of Christ is complex. On the one hand, White believes fully in the possibility of eternal death in case Christ had committed sin. However, conversely, even in the case of perfect obedience, she seems to claim that Christ had an unconscious state, potentially even of his divine nature, which she does not openly call 'death'. One of the risks of Christology, within the frame of the Trinitarian discourse, is that of 'protecting' the divine status of Christ by avoiding any discourse about the implication of divine nature in the suffering and death of the Son of God on the cross. This exploration will, therefore, call again into discussion mainstream Christological and Trinitarian views in the attempt to comprehend whether Christ could cease to exist or go out of existence both as human and as divine.

5.4 Remarks on The Cost and Risk of God's Death

White highlights that "the plan of infinite sacrifice"[530] was provided for the salvation of man and that "nothing but the death of God's dear Son could expiate man's sin."[531] What she calls 'infinite sacrifice' serves to emphasise the high value of the death of the Son of God. Therefore, she claims there was no other way to expiate humanity's sin if not through the death of Christ. Further, White adds that the sacrifice, typified by the biblical system of sacrifices and offerings, would not only reveal the love of God and impress on the minds of man the consequences of sin and its nature but

[529] "The Lord is Risen Indeed," Ms 94, 29 September 1897, para. 9; republished in "The Lord is Risen," YI 2 May 1901, para. 8.
[530] "The Plan of Salvation," ST 20 February 1893, para. 1.
[531] Ibid.

also "the merit of divine offering."[532] By emphasising that Christ would not turn aside from the plan of redemption, White continues by affirming implicitly that Christ could have sinned. However, even knowing all the path of sorrow and humiliation he would have to pass through, he did not refuse to "descend step by step to the depths of man's woe."[533] He became one with the fallen race; God became man as Christ "consented to die in the sinner's stead."[534] Therefore, White's use of the language of 'condescension' well addresses Christ's voluntary descent from his divine nature to the human one, implying a real relinquishment of his dignity and nature.[535]

This becomes even more evident in two crucial statements that White pens in 1898. The first is in the book *The Desire of Ages,* where she writes,

> Never can the cost of our redemption be realized until the redeemed shall stand with the Redeemer before the throne of God. Then as the glories of the eternal home burst upon our enraptured senses we shall remember that Jesus left all this for us, that He not only became an exile from the heavenly courts, but for us took the risk of failure and eternal loss.[536]

Christ indeed left all to save humanity. He became an exile from heaven and entirely took the risk of ceasing to exist. This is a cost that cannot ever be fully understood. But, in eternity, this risk will always be remembered. White writes that when the redeemed ones "shall stand with the Redeemer", they "shall remember that Jesus left all." If this is something that must be remembered, it means it is something highly essential to understand today. This is rational thinking. Moreover, it is clear that with the term 'risk', White is literally thinking of "failure and eternal loss." There is no shadow of a doubt that 'risk' is a word fully implying something different than an 'insured return ticket to heaven' for the Son of God, whatever the outcome of his life on earth would have been. "Eternal loss", or the death of God's Son, is what White thinks when she talks of 'risk'.

The second statement appeared in *The Signs of the Times.* The clarity of the argument is rather incontestable. White presents a clear-cut answer to whether Christ could sin and what risk would be involved if he sinned. She explains that,

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[532] Ibid.

[533] Ibid., para. 8.

[534] Ibid., para. 9.

[535] See "The Purpose and Plan of Grace," ST 25 April 1892, para. 8.

[536] DA, 131.

> Could Satan in the least particular have tempted Christ to sin, he would have bruised the Saviour's head. As it was, he could only touch His heel. Had the head of Christ been touched, the hope of the human race would have perished. Divine wrath would have come upon Christ as it came upon Adam. Christ and the church would have been without hope.[537]

White highlights that Christ could have been tempted. He could have also sinned, even in "the least particular." This would have allowed Satan to bruise the "Saviour's head." In other words, Satan could have attempted to the very life of the Son of God. But this did not happen. Satan could "only touch" Christ's heel, probably an expression pointing to his human life. But, if that had been possible, or as White writes, if "the head of Christ" could have "been touched, " all hope of human redemption would have been lost. Not only this, but divine wrath would have also fallen upon Christ as upon every human being. Both Christ and the church, or the human race, "would have been without hope."

This is furthermore supported by an even earlier statement, penned in 1858, which also directly points to the question of the risk and the failure of the plan of salvation, such as that "Satan wished to cause Jesus to presume upon the mercy of his Father, and risk his life before the fulfillment of his mission. He had hoped that the plan of salvation would fail."[538] In the same direction, but in the context of the crucifixion, White writes in 1882 that "Satan hoped that such mockery and violence would call forth from the Son of God some complaint or murmur; or that He would manifest His divine power, and wrench Himself from the grasp of the multitude, and that thus the plan of salvation might at last fail."[539]

White is sure that the plan of salvation could have failed. This is a straightforward statement and appears unequivocal as to its meaning. Obviously, this doctrinal stand is against most of the current Trinitarian theologies. The idea that God's own Son faced the peril of eternal loss does not appear as a central question in Trinitarian and Christological debates today. It is relevant to remember that, as previously said, White does not adopt theological formulations like "one person and substance"[540] to refer to the Godhead. And she believes that the incarnated Son of God was a person, a human person, like every other human being on earth. That is why she never argues for

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[537] "Tempted in All Points Like as We Are," ST 9 June 1898, para. 4; see also 1SM, 256.

[538] 1SP, 32.

[539] EW, 169.

[540] Henry Bettenson (ed.), *Documents of the Christian Church* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1960), 72-73.

an anhypostatic reality, a sort of impersonal humanity, nor for an enhypostatic view where Christ could somewhat 'pretend' to be human, possessing a personhood that could not stand alone.[541] On the contrary, she opposes every possible theology that does not claim human nature's most authentic and most profound assumption. She does it to the point of claiming that Christ assumed all the deficiencies of human nature, including the possibility of sinning and then dying.

She further highlights that Christ's own eternal existence, at stake for human redemption, is indeed the most profound and most sublime revelation of God's love towards man, because "Heaven itself was imperiled for our redemption. At the foot of the cross, remembering that for one sinner Jesus would have yielded up his life, we may estimate the value of a soul."[542] Against ordinary forgetfulness or dismissal, White encourages her readers to 'remember' that actually, the sacrifice on the cross was an incredible risk, involving an incalculable cost proportionate to the value of human life in the eyes of God. The paradox of this divine love rests in the incomprehensible idea that God loves humanity more than his own divinity. He was ready to give up his divine eternal life in an attempt to bring eternal life to humanity. Christ could have sinned and been lost forever together with the human race. His "own eternal existence" would no longer be.

In a letter sent during White's missionary sojourn in Australia to her second son Edson and his wife, Emma McDearmon, she transmits the same message by saying,

> Christ has found his pearl of great price in lost, perishing souls. He sold all that he had to come into possession, even engaged to do the work, and run the risk of losing his own life in the conflict. How then should man regard his fellow man? Christ has demonstrated the way. He says, 'A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.'[543]

Based on the Scriptural reference of Matthew 13 about the parable of the pearl of great price, White interprets the selling of all possessions on the part of the merchant as referring to the great

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[541] For further discussion of the use of the term enhypostasis/anhypostasis, see Christoph Markschies, "Enhypostasis/Anhypostasis," in *Religion Past and Present* (eds. Hans Dieter Betz, Eberhard Jüngel, et al.; Leiden; Brill, 2011); Macleod writes: "The import of enhypostasis is that the human nature of Christ, although not itself an individual, is individualized as the human nature of the Son of God. It does not, for a single instant, exist as anhypostasis or non-personal" Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ* (CCTheo series; Leicester/Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 202.

[542] "Seeking the Lost," para. 23.

[543] Lt 119, 9 March 1895 (to J. Edson White and Emma McDearmon).

risk taken in saving the precious pearl of the perishing souls. Most of all, Christ "run the risk of losing his own life in the conflict." The comment points to the example of love given by Christ. As he loved humanity to the point of running the risk of losing his own life, one should love his "fellow man." The statement is clear as to its theological implications. Christ risked his own life. There might not be speculation beyond this point, but White is sure that the very same life of Christ was at stake. He could have indeed gone out of existence.

White continues expanding on the topic around the same period as these previously mentioned statements and of the publication of the book *The Desire of Ages*. Her work has never been systematic *per se.* Her Christology, and in general her theology, is based on her biblical hermeneutics and of parenetical purpose, as shown in the comment on the parable of the pearl of great price in Matthew 13. Therefore, she writes according to exigencies and has never intended to write a treatise of systematic or historical theology on the topic of Christ's infinite risk. However, her biblical theology is a profound source of Christological concepts that challenge several questions of modern systematic and historical theology.

Another example of this is in a statement penned in 1899 in *The Signs of the Times.* She talks of Christ humbling himself to become human, but even in this status, "the Godhead was still His own."[544] While she emphasises the combination of the two natures as coexisting in the person of Christ, she also adds that "His Deity could not be lost while He stood faithful and true to His loyalty."[545] This statement claims that the deity, intending Christ's divine nature, could not be lost, but only while he kept faithful and loyal. Because of this, "Jesus could yet speak of Himself as the Son of man in heaven. He was ready to take once more His divine glory when His work on earth was done."[546] Therefore, it becomes logical to reason that if he had not kept himself faithful, he would have lost his deity and died as God. It seems that there is no other way to interpret this statement.

As previously discussed, White's theological position, though not systematically presented, can be understood today as leaning towards a non-Trinitarian perspective.[547] At the same time, her views indeed challenge many theological assumptions, especially when she argues that Christ is a

[544] "Christ Glorified," ST 10 May 1899, para. 11.

[545] Ibid.

[546] Ibid.

[547] See especially 1.3 "White's Infinite Risk Theology between Christological and Trinitarian Discussions" for further discussion. Nevertheless, the discourse surrounding this argument is examined at different junctures in this study.

separate person from the Father and could have lost his "divine attributes" if he had committed even the smallest of sins and that this would prevent his resurrection. These opinions do not find a large *consensus* amongst scholars today. Even those advocating for a sinless Christ against an impeccable Christ would not be comfortable with White's idea of a peccable Christ and, thus, with the concept of the death of God. As Bavinck writes, "the possibility of him sinning and falling is unthinkable"[548] for those who believe that the Son of God is the eternal Logos who is one with the Father and always carries out his Father's will.

Consequently, it becomes logical implication to think that Christ, as the Son of God, could not sin and die. The opposite would require another perspective, hardly accepted or unanimously discarded. In the words of Bavinck, "God himself would have to be able to sin – which is blasphemy – or the union between the divine and the human nature is considered breakable and in fact denied."[549] These hypotheses are considered either blasphemy or a denial of the hypostatic union of divine and human nature in Christ.

In an article published in the Advent Review in 2008, penned by Roy Adams, the author supports White's view of Christ's risk in the Incarnation in the following statement,

> To say there was no risk in the Incarnation is to argue the biblically untenable position that it was impossible for Jesus to sin. If that were the case, then we'd be into divine playacting of the most cynical kind. And Jesus' 40-day fast in the desert, His all-night prayer vigils, and His agony in Gethsemane would all amount to a cruel farce.[550]

Therefore, in the words of Adams, it seems biblically untenable to hold the position that Christ did not assume any risk in the Incarnation and that it was impossible for him to sin. Adams calls it a "divine playacting of the most cynical kind." All the suffering of Christ would then be just a cruel farce. Nothing of the gospel story would have to be taken seriously enough to depict God's deepest and most loving sacrifice for the salvation of humanity. This plainly contradicts White's writings on the topic. I value the agreement between White's and Adams' views expressed by his following statement, "if Jesus was at all an example for us, He had to have come with the same freedom we all have as humans to choose God's will or to reject it. […] To say there was no risk would be to say

[548] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Sin and Salvation in Christ*, 314.

[549] Ibid.

[550] Roy Adams, "An impenetrable mystery," *Advent Review* 17 April 2008.

that Jesus could not sin just because God knew that He would not."[551] In line with this opinion, White's Christology builds on her Soteriology because to be able to save, Christ needed to be an example in all; he needed to be able to die. Moreover, he needed to have the same free will to accept or reject God. As rejecting God or committing sin can cause the death of a sinner, it also creates the possibility of the death of the Son of God. White's repeated emphasis on the risk Christ incurred would not be valid if "Jesus could not sin just because God knew that He would not," in the words of Adams.

A view of the nature of God, or a Trinitarian doctrine, which does not consider the question of the risk of Christ in offering his life as a ransom for many, may eclipse the profound and inexplicable love of God for humanity. Not many current Christological or Trinitarian debates consider this question a core one. A triune theology may tend to deny that there was a real risk threatening the life of the Saviour and that his divine existence was truly at stake in his redemptive sacrifice. In this regard, what White writes already in 1879, may further highlight her distance from classical Trinitarian theology since the very beginning of her theological activity. She notes that "Jesus had united with the Father in making the world. Amid the agonizing sufferings of the Son of God, blind and deluded men alone remain unfeeling. The chief priests and elders revile God's dear Son while in his expiring agonies. Yet inanimate nature groans in sympathy with her bleeding, dying Author."[552] White clearly tells who did die at Calvary. She points to Christ as the Creator of the world together with his Father. He was the divine Son of God and the 'Author' of the whole creation. She also adds that creation itself reacted at the dying of the author of life on the cross,

> The earth trembled and the sun was obscured as if the heaven itself was covering in blackness. The angels could not bear the horrid scene and hid their faces. It was an unbearable sight because: Christ is in despair! He is dying! His Father's approving smile is removed, and angels are not permitted to lighten the gloom of the terrible hour. They could only behold in amazement their loved Commander suffering the penalty of man's transgression of the Father's law.[553]

The despair of the dying Christ could not find the comfort of His Father's approving smile. Not even the angels could bear any light of hope. Christ, the Commander of the host of heaven, should

[551] Adams, "An impenetrable mystery."
[552] "The Sufferings of Christ," ST 21 August 1879, para. 17.
[553] Ibid.

stand alone the terrible hour and suffer the penalty of the transgression of God's law. All of this informs of the pre-existence of Christ as the Son of God. At the same time, it emphasises the real suffering of Christ, the real possibility of divine death, and the abandoning of the heavenly court to come to the rescue. If there was no risk, nor real suffering, no real vacation of heaven, no real implications for the divinity, then why would the angels want to help their creator? And why would the Father's approving smile be removed from his Son?

Moreover, could the approval of his Father be removed forever if Christ had sinned? The approving smile of God being withdrawn speaks of the consequences of sin: distance from God and death. As White underlines, the transgression of the Law of God has serious implications. The penalty is eternal death. Therefore, the idea that Christ remains, somehow, always part of the 'triune' substance of God seriously challenges the idea that Christ could suffer and die in both natures. White's reasoning goes in the opposite direction.

In the words of White, Christ assumed human nature as a veil covering the divine one. Consequently, due to the Incarnation, if he had sinned, he would have done it both as a human being and as a divine one. Paradoxically, he would also be a God sinning. In this case, both natures would sin, and therefore, both natures would be subjected to the consequences of sin. Logical reasoning requires thinking about the demands of the Law of God. A sinner would meet the transgression of the Law by being condemned to death. Would Christ be sentenced to death if he had sinned? This seems logical; however, speculation is a risk, and deductive reasoning may fail.

Furthering this argument on Christ dying as the Creator of the world, in a later writing, White explains, in reference to the darkness surrounding the cross from the sixth hour until the ninth hour, that "the earth was bereft of the light of the sun. The Sun of Righteousness was withdrawing his light from the world, and nature sympathized with her dying Author."[554] The argument supports the idea that the divine nature of Christ as the Creator of the world was involved in the death of the human nature. Nature was sympathizing with her Author. White enforces the argument in another paragraph of the same article with a forthright statement regarding the nature of the dying Christ. She writes that when the cry "It is finished" was heard, "Christ, the Majesty of heaven, the King of glory, was dead."[555] If read within the context of her understanding, it is a striking expression that

[554] "He was Wounded for our Transgressions," RH 28 December 1897, para. 12.

[555] Ibid., para. 15. In the context of White's argument on Christ as the Majesty of heaven and the King of glory, it is noteworthy to consider the influence of imperial Rome on such theological perspectives. White's connection between

divinity was at risk in the sacrifice. With the same emphasis, she also adds that "The Jewish leaders had crucified the Son of God."[556]

The declaration that the Majesty of heaven, the King of glory, the Son of God, was dead may prompt the question: Is White, therefore, arguing that somehow the divinity did die with the humanity and subsequently resurrected? In the same line of thought, White writes that "Nature sympathized with the suffering of its Author. The heaving earth, the rent rocks, proclaimed that it was the Son of God who died."[557] Even these last words, "It was the Son of God who died," point to the same concept and raise the same question. There is an incomprehensible implication of the divinity in the death of the humanity. These statements seem to suggest that even if Christ had not sinned, his divine person somehow 'accompanied' the human nature in death. However, in other writings, White states that Christ's divine nature did not die at the cross because Christ had been faithful. She argues for this within the framework of the possibility of an eternal death of Christ, even as a divine being, if he had sinned. As White says, the result of grace cannot be told as Christ mysteriously "allied himself to human nature."[558] Hence, refraining from speculative interpretations, her argument, as previously said, appears aimed at achieving a synthesis of divine and human nature even more symbiotic than what is found in other theological perspectives. Her language appears to be meant to strengthen this latter concept without arguing for anything related to the complicated question of what happened to the divine nature when Christ died both as a sinner and as a winner.

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the darkness at the crucifixion and the withdrawal of the "Sun of Righteousness" suggests an intertwining of 'natural phenomena' with theological significance. Critical examination is warranted to explore the cultural and historical backdrop of White's theological framework, particularly in relation to Roman imperial ideology and its impact on Christian thought. For a comprehensive exploration of the influence of imperial Rome on early Christian theology, some valuable insights may be found in works such as *Religions of Rome: Volume 1, A History* by Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* by Steven J. Friesen (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001) and *The Lord of the Entire World: Lord Jesus, a Challenge to Lord Caesar?* by Joseph D. Fantin (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011). These texts, among others, delve into the socio-cultural dynamics of the Roman Empire and its impact on the theological landscape, offering nuanced perspectives on the intersection of imperial ideology and Christian beliefs during the formative periods of Christianity.

[556] Ibid.

[557] 2T, 211.

[558] "The Divine Teacher," SpTEd 173. The full statement is here: "The One appointed in the counsels of heaven came to the earth as an instructor. He was no less a being than the Creator of the world, the Son of the Infinite God. The rich benevolence of God gave him to our world; and to meet the necessities of humanity, he took on him human nature. To the astonishment of the heavenly host, he walked this earth as the Eternal Word. Fully prepared, he left the royal courts to come to a world marred and polluted with sin. Mysteriously he allied himself to human nature. 'The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.' God's excess of goodness, benevolence, and love was a surprise to the world, of grace which could be realized, but not told."

Instead, what would have happened to Christ as a divine person if he had sinned seems very clear to White. An eternal loss would have been the fate. However, this remains an inexplicable risk in many respects.

Chapter 6

An Inexplicable Risk

Fiddes writes in his book *Participating in God* that "we may talk of the risk that God took in creation, and the way God shares that risk in suffering. Rational theodicy is thus not divorced from practical theodicy: they are both connected with a suffering that 'befalls' God or 'happens' to God. But it still remains open to decide whether God's creative decision that set all this off is worth the cost."[559] Fiddes discusses these concepts within the framework of a chapter titled "The Vulnerable God and the Problem of Suffering." The idea of a vulnerable God would perfectly fit White's view of what happened at the cross, if read in light of the risk of eternal loss. If this is the extent of the risk implied by creation, then God indeed shows himself vulnerable. As previously seen, Fiddes is clear in affirming that in granting freedom to creation, which cannot but be created perfect, God takes a risk, or in his words, "a *considerable* risk."[560]

In Fiddes' opinion, if God is in a certain way responsible for how the world turned in the wrong direction – and the extent of this responsibility may differ from White's views – then "a God of love will *take* responsibility. As a faithful covenant-partner, God must share the suffering that flows from the risk."[561] White's theology is in line with the idea of God as a faithful and loving partner taking responsibility for the consequences of sin. White's understanding of God's sacrifice is framed within a concept of love, however, detached from the potential obligation of creation. In other words, White would not argue for a God who dies on the ground of responsibility, or not only, but of love. I agree with Fiddes that, as he writes, "Only the fact that God suffers can make credible the tracing of suffering to the free will of creation."[562] However, God's sufferings may not be the only credible way to understand free will. White would go further by arguing for God's possibility of eternal death as the form in which human free will and God's love may truly be understood. Fiddes argues that exposing "creation to the high risk of slipping into non-being," would then result in the fact that "God too will face the outcome of the risk."[563] As a syllogical progression, would then God also risk slipping into non-being? This is reasonably true for White. But, even if Fiddes suggests that the

[559] Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity*, 186.
[560] Ibid.
[561] Ibid.
[562] Ibid.
[563] Ibid.

vulnerability of creation somehow translates into a shared vulnerability with the divine, his perspective of risk is solely directed towards the creation and what its slipping into non-being may mean for God, with no direct risk for his divine nature and his being. In other words, creation has been left free to reject God, and this has not been without some consequences.

Fiddes is sure that it "may help us to say that the making of persons is worth all the tears. But only faith can answer the question, 'is it worth it?' after all reasonable arguments have fallen silent."[564] It is certainly not easy to think of a suffering humanity, tortured by unimaginable pains, as worth the price of free will. It is not always a counterbalancing assurance that of knowing that somehow God suffers with humanity. This is where White's theology may contribute to understanding the Incarnation.[565] For White, humanity plays a decisive role in the destiny of divinity. Still, it is essential to remember that in the Incarnation, "the issues at stake were beyond the comprehension of man."[566] However, within this horizon, White's concept of infinite risk can help grasp the worth of God's action in creation and redemption and shed light on God facing the "outcome of the risk".

6.1 Divinity's Death and its Universal Consequences

In 1878, in a collection of her writings titled *Spirit of Prophecy,* White reflects on the dialogue between Christ and Peter in Matthew 16:21-23.[567] Christ preannounces his death and resurrection, while Peter opposes the idea that he could die. White writes that Peter "could not conceive it possible that the Son of God should be put to death. Satan suggested to his mind that if Jesus was the Son of God he could not die."[568] Indeed, the idea that the Son of God could die is still rejected today by, if not all, the majority of Christologies. It seems inconceivable that Christ, as a divine being,

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[564] Ibid., 187.

[565] Theological definitions, of Chalcedon nuance, such as "there is in the total person of Jesus Christ that which is truly human, that which is truly divine, and that which truly establishes the union of the two in one incarnate life," are not yet clear enough to what they intend, especially regarding what risk God had to run in the Incarnation. See Norman Pittenfers, *The Word Incarnate* (London: Nisbet, 1959), 96.

[566] "The Purpose and Plan of Grace," ST 25 April 1892, para. 6.

[567] "From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.' But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'"

[568] "Jesus at Galilee," 3SP, 231.

or his divine nature, could die. Even if it is not easy to define Peter's understanding of Christ's divinity, it is nevertheless clear that White holds the idea that Satan instigated the reaction of Peter on the basis of the misconception that Christ, being the Son of God, could not die. She points out that Satan suggested to Peter the idea that the Son of God, Christ, could not die precisely because he was divine. It becomes evident that this is the core element of White's statement. Peter had somehow a sort of perception and comprehension of Christ as a divine being. He was then motivated to react to Christ's announcement of his death by claiming that it was impossible for a divine being, the Son of God, to die. This is still the understanding of many theological approaches. If Christ is God, he cannot die. This may also be inferred by the great disappointment the death of Christ on the cross meant for the disciples if it implicitly denied Christ's divinity. Even the mockery shouts around the cross, "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross" (Mt 27:40), may be read along these conceptual lines. This makes stronger the idea that nobody was expecting a resurrection. Everyone believed a closed tomb was the only reality, because a God cannot die.

It can surely be underlined that this is not what White understands. Her interpretation of the Gospel narrative of Peter's dialogue with Christ is in line with her infinite risk theology. The concept that divinity cannot die or did not die because of its attributes (especially within the one-substance Trinitarian view of immutability, indivisibility, and impeccability) is undoubtedly not what White believes. She strongly argues against it, as she believes that the fullness of God's sacrificial love may only be thoroughly understood in light of the potential infinite risk involved in the Incarnation. As evidenced in her reading of Matthew 16, her biblical hermeneutics moves towards other directions away from mainstream theologies.

In the book *The Desire of Ages,* White also writes that "the Jewish priests were not conscious that type had met anti-type, that an infinite sacrifice had been made for the sins of the world."[569] The arguments developed in the same book seem to express what she means by 'infinite sacrifice'. As previously seen, White talks of the fact that Christ could not see through the portals of the tomb and that he did not see the hope of coming forth from the grave as a conqueror. Nor could he know of the Father's acceptance of his sacrifice, to the point that he feared that sin was so offensive to separate him eternally from his Father.[570] If it were true that Christ's divinity could not be

[569] DA, 774.

[570] See Ibid., 753.

surrendered to sacrifice, then his fears were totally ungrounded. However, White highlights that Christ risked 'all' and that even heaven itself was placed in danger.

6.1.1 Human or Divine Sacrifice?

The biblical position that Christ has been tempted is undeniable, though there is disagreement about how close his temptations were to those of every mortal being. In other words, there is debate around the question of the temptations of Christ, whether they have been identical to that of human beings and if it was necessary for him to be tempted like everyone else in order to be able to help humanity. Benjamin B. Warfield (1851-1921) argues that there has been a tendency, evolved early in Christianity, to "believe that Jesus needed to assume and sanctify all human passions."[571] However, the debates remain heated on the topic, as previously discussed. Anyway, for his sacrifice to be an 'infinite' one, it would require his divinity to be surrendered; otherwise, his death would only be a 'finite' sacrifice, a human sacrifice of a human being. He would have died only as the 'son of man', as a human being, and not also as the Son of God. Paradoxically, this would also mean that if he had sinned but could retain his divinity and lose only his humanity, he would have been a sinner 'saved' without a Saviour and without a human nature. He would have still enjoyed the glory and honours of heaven and be equal with his Father. The rest of the sinners, instead, would have been lost forever. Therefore, when White says that "Christ risked all," one should probably intend 'all.'

The argument is complex and intertwined with several other theological ones. By reason of the Incarnation, it may seem easy to say that Christ became a person with two natures. His victory on the cross evidently implied only the death of his human nature. However, only in the scenario of an infinite risk would the divine nature be called to give account.

In 1904, White answers a rhetorical question that may highlight her views on the two natures of Christ. She writes: "Was the human nature of the Son of Mary changed into the divine nature of the Son of God? No; the two natures were mysteriously blended into one person - the Man Christ Jesus. In Him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily."[572] She highlights that the human nature did not substitute the divine one. Both natures co-existed in one person, mysteriously blended in the

[571] Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Person and Work of Christ* (Philadelphia: the Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1970), 93.
[572] Lt. 280a, 3 September 1904, para. 8.

"Man Christ Jesus." She does not expand on the possible consequences of this blending nor the influences of each nature on the other. Nevertheless, the concept of 'blended natures in one person' is crucial to the Christological discourse of White. She implies that something happened in the person of Christ. In His pre-existing divine nature, he was a person with only one nature, the divine one. In the incarnated nature, he has two natures, the human and the divine, blended mysteriously together. Christ exists in two natures but in one person, or in one blended divine-human nature in one person. In the same work, White writes one of the most difficult, and perhaps controversial, of her statements about the death and deity of Christ. In specific, expanding on the previous argument that the divine and human natures were mysteriously blended, she talks of the 'impossibility' of the divine nature to die. She explains that,

> When Christ was crucified, it was His human nature that died. Deity did not sink and die; that would have been impossible. Christ, the sinless One, will save every son and daughter of Adam who accepts the salvation proffered them, consenting to become the children of God. The Saviour has purchased the fallen race with His own blood.[573]

She affirms clearly that the human nature died. Certainly, this affirmation does not raise any specific issue. Nor would the rest of the statement, except for the phrase "Deity did not sink and die" and much more "…that would have been impossible." However, as it has been shown, she clearly says that the Incarnation and sacrifice would mean a risk for heaven itself and that Christ risked 'all.' Moreover, she writes about Christ's fear of being eternally separated from the Father, though without explaining if that fear comes from his human nature or also his divine nature, but very likely from both of them as the two natures are 'blended'. She writes about Christ being the object of divine justice and left in a closed tomb, sharing the destiny of the sinner if he had sinned. Therefore, it is sure for White that while on the cross, Christ could not see beyond the grave.

In the same vein as this previous challenging statement, another one may shed light on the issue. After quoting John 11:25[574] and the words of Christ about being the resurrection and the life, White writes that "He who had said, 'I lay down my life, that I might take it again,' came forth from the grave to life that was in himself. Humanity died: divinity did not die."[575] In this depiction of Christ's death, White presents the scenario without explicitly referencing the potential infinite risk discussed

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[573] Ibid.

[574] "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live'."

[575] "The Risen Saviour," YI 4 August 1898, para. 1; see also "The Risen Saviour," YI 3 January 1905.

in her other works. Therefore, in her argumentation, she plainly declares that only the human nature died, as the divine one had not to die as Christ lived a perfect life. The risk of going out of existence is not at the core of this statement. Nevertheless, White's words clearly distinguish the two natures and imply a question regarding the possibility of the divine nature dying. White follows, adding that "In his divinity, Christ possessed the power to break the bonds of death. He declares that he has life in himself to quicken whom he will."[576] Christ had the power to lay his life and take it back again as a divine being, but all of this is described as possible only within the framework of a perfect, sinless sacrifice. The risk scenario is not brought to the front in this argument. Therefore, this specific statement seems not to contradict the possibility of a risk for the Son of God as contemplated elsewhere in White's theology. On the contrary, by claiming that human nature died and divine nature did not, White brings implicitly into discussion the question of the death of both natures as a potential outcome. Therefore, the fact that divinity did not, or could not, die seems to be based on the perfect and faultless life of Christ. Then, what if the situation were different and Christ had sinned?

As a matter of fact, if Christ had sinned, there would have been only two main potential scenarios. He could die and go out of existence or keep his divinity but fail his redemptive plan. Anyway, salvation would be a failure with eternal consequences for the Godhead and heaven itself, the extent of which is beyond comprehension. Therefore, advancing some more answers to the claim "Deity did not sink and die; that would have been impossible", the soteriological frame of the statement may point to at least three possible answers: 1. The risk scenario may not be intended in the conceptual framework of this specific statement. Therefore, the impossible death of the deity should be intended on the ground of the sinless life of Christ. The opposite scenario with a 'sinner' Christ is not actually considered; 2. If the deity could not die, even in the case in which Christ had sinned, then this would perhaps imply that he could go back to heaven but be overcome by Satan. This would have led to incalculable and unimaginable consequences. This answer does not find support in White's writings and is not coherent with the several statements analysed so far; 3. Another possible explanation is that White does not refer here to the divine person of Christ but to the "Deity" as Godhead. In this case, this would point away from the context of Christ's existence to look into the broader concept of divinity.

[576] "The Risen Saviour," YI 4 August 1898, para. 1.

While the first point seems to follow more direct reasoning, as I previously argued, it is not easy at first to discern which of these possible answers may properly interpret White's view or if a combination of those may also be possible. It is in White's own writings that a response must be found. I argue that a potential key to understanding the meaning of this statement is located in the affirmation of White that Christ is "the sinless One." The soteriological nature of the statement and the remark on the sinless status of Christ at the moment of the crucifixion advocate for the first answer. It has been impossible for the deity to sink and die only because Christ did not sin. In this case, the risk scenario would not be implied in the argument. This would agree with what White has strongly supported in her writings: the risk of eternal death. For this reason, the second answer is not reflected in the writings of White, and the third is an option that does not fit the soteriological context of the statement nor finds support in White's Christological views.

If, according to 2 Corinthians 5:21,[577] Christ was made sin, understanding the meaning of this claim may guide to different conclusions. However, it remains clear that Christ's assuming human nature implied assuming the nature of sin to a certain extent. As it has been said so far, divine and human nature were necessary for the sacrifice of Christ. Therefore, it may become possible to think that both natures assumed the risk. It becomes furthermore possible to think that the blended nature of Christ brought the divine part of it to be 'influenced' by the human one and, therefore, be subjected to the deficiency of the human one, with all the consequences of sin, including eternal death.

Excluding *a priori* that the divine Christ could not die even if he had sinned may reduce the 'size' of what God did to purchase "the fallen race with His own blood." This would downsize the sacrifice on the cross to something merely human. Therefore, taking for granted that risk was involved in the plan of redemption, if Christ had sinned, he would have shared the fate of human beings: eternal death. If one were to think that divinity joined with humanity cannot die, the only way of 'saving' heaven itself from paying the consequence of sin would be that of an impeccable Christ. The opposite would be a problem. What would have happened to Christ and the Godhead if Christ had sinned but could go back to heaven because of his immortal divinity and without immediate consequences? It is impossible to know what would have happened if Christ could have returned to heaven after failing. The idea of keeping Christ's divinity even in the face of sin, while the redemptive

[577] "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

plan failed, does not seem logical either. As speculation takes ground in this reasoning, I turn to White again for further analysis.

I believe that White comes to more precise definitions in a number of statements published already in 1898. In the book *Desire of Ages,* she writes,

> Satan in heaven had hated Christ for His position in the courts of God. He hated Him the more when he himself was dethroned. He hated Him who pledged Himself to redeem a race of sinners. Yet into the world where Satan claimed dominion God permitted His Son to come, a helpless babe, subject to the weakness of humanity. He permitted Him to meet life's peril in common with every human soul, to fight the battle as every child of humanity must fight it, at the risk of failure and eternal loss.[578]

This statement is among the most direct answers to the very meaning of the infinite risk. What would have happened to Christ if he had sinned? Here, White answers by saying that the risk was "failure and eternal loss." God the Father permitted his Son to be subjected to the weakness of humanity and to meet the perils of life "in common with every human soul." Christ battled "as" every human being. The assumption of human nature was in its most total sense. Eternal loss was the risk; non-existence would be the destiny. He who shared "in common" with every human being the weaknesses of human nature would also share the same condemnation.

Therefore, thinking again about the previous statement by White regarding the "Deity did not sink and die; that would have been impossible," in light of what she means by 'infinite risk,' I believe that there is only one possible meaning. I reiterate that Christ, as "the sinless One", could not die in his divine nature because he never sinned. As in other occasions, when White refers to the impossibility of the divine nature to die, she always talks about it within the framework of a spotless sacrifice. I argue that there is no risk scenario in the picture when White talks of the impossible death of divinity.

What would a sacrifice be without direct implications for the one sacrificing himself? What would be the sacrifice for Christ if nothing was at stake in it? If only humanity could die, then this would imply that a human sacrifice was the only one needed for atonement. This would place merit on human nature, on the works of human beings, and would then promote the idea that any human

[578] DA, 49.

being could have made that sacrifice. Then, Christ was not truly needed, and a 'divine sacrifice' was unnecessary. I am aware that this reasoning is far from being a solution and from clarifying in which sense a 'divine sacrifice' may be needed. The lack of proper human language and understanding is evident here. However, what becomes crucial is to realize that an 'unbalanced' reading of the soteriological value of the sacrifice of Christ, tending to emphasise the merits of one nature or the other, may bring to a misleading Christology. In other words, for the Incarnation and sacrifice of Christ to be valid for the atonement of man, both natures must be united in a joint sacrifice. The way this happened may not be easy to express or comprehend. The value of the sacrifice may not rest on one or the other disjointedly, as in one case, humanity could claim merits, while in the other, divinity would not represent an example for man. The blending of both natures in 'balance', fully human and fully God, is the mysterious way a human-divine sacrifice becomes the perfect one to save humankind. Both natures are necessary. Consequently, both natures are assuming all the risks involved in the sacrifice. Christ has offered himself fully with no limits in a joint human-divine nature as both the son of man and the Son of God.

In this regard, White writes in 1893 that in Christ, "divinity and humanity are combined, and this was what gave efficacy to the offering of Calvary."[579] No human being nor angel could have offered a joint nature. None but Christ could have paid the penalty for sin. For eternity, Christ will possess both natures. He does not possess only the divine one, but the story of redemption has produced a change: humanity is joined to divinity in the person of Christ. As White writes, "in Him who sits upon the throne of the universe, divinity and humanity are combined."[580] This mystery is the result of his sacrifice on the cross. The offer of graces consists of Christ uniting "the believing soul to His own divine-human nature. In His mediatorial office, His divinity and humanity are combined, and upon this union hangs the hope of the world."[581] The divine-human nature of the exalted Christ is the only hope for the redemption of humankind. As this section has evidenced, White's theology is evident in affirming that the divinity of Christ would have died together with his humanity. This is a problematic and unpopular theology, as the next section will highlight.

[579] "The Way of Christ," BE 15 March 1893, para. 3.

[580] COL, 384.

[581] "At Simon's House," ST 9 May 1990, para. 20.

6.1.2 Reading Beyond White's Theology of Infinite Risk

As mentioned earlier, White's theology of infinite risk remains overlooked within her tradition and has not been engaged with in mainstream scholarly discussions. As a final example, previously anticipated, a valuable exception to consider here is a brief reference to it in a study authored by Longacre in 1947, a relevant theologian in Adventism, especially for his position on religious liberty. His views on the deity of Christ may help here to shed light on White's Christology. However, it is essential to understand why this author may be an authentic reader of White's writings and an interpreter of her theology. For this purpose, it becomes necessary to contextualize his theological views and provide some relevant elements regarding his person.

Longacre joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church towards the end of the nineteenth century, in 1895. After three years, in 1898, he completed his ministerial training precisely when the important book by White, *The Desire of Ages*, was first published, containing some of the central arguments of her Christology and statements about her infinite risk theology. This is relevant information to understand how White's views of Godhead influenced Longacre's theological views. He was very closely acquainted with White and other Adventist pioneers. All of this must be kept in mind when reading his theological contribution.[582] In 1947, he was offered the opportunity to present a short paper (around 15 pages) titled "The Deity of Christ" to the Bible Research Fellowship at Pacific Union College in California. It was a time in which Adventism had controversies regarding the divinity of Christ and a tendency towards mainstream Trinitarian views. The purpose of Longacre's paper was to promote discussion and evaluation of the current views.

I do not intend here to offer a complete discussion of his paper, as it would fall beyond the purpose of this research. I rather wish to frame his work in its historical context to highlight Longacre's agreement with White on the question of infinite risk while attempting to expand on it. His paper is a testimony that the question of Christ's infinite risk was clearly understood, at least by

[582] A biography is available in Don F. Neufeld, *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia* (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald Pub. Association; first published in the 1960s, revised in 1976, and revised again in 1996) 1966 edit., vol.10, 719-740; see also Nathaniel Krum, *Charles S. Longacre, Champion of Religious Liberty* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1959). He held a number of relevant positions within Adventism and at an academic level. He served as a minister, evangelist, school administrator, university lecturer, editor, and author. He received signs of appreciation from secular authorities and other non-Adventist Christian denominations for his outstanding achievements and his contributions to religious freedom and a better understanding of life. He was even present at White's funeral in 1915 and was also one of the bearers of her coffin.

Longacre. However, it is clear that it did not find full support in later Adventist theology and felt out of any theological debates if not at all opposed.

Longacre highlights the problems of certain Trinity concepts that end up denying the eternal existence of Christ. He develops his Trinitarian and Christological views on the grounds of White's theology. He supports the idea that Christ could commit sin and expands on the concept of his eternal death as follows,

> If it were impossible for the Son of God to make a mistake or commit a sin, then His coming into this world and subjecting Himself to temptations were all a farce and mere mockery. If it were possible for Him to yield to temptation and fall into sin, then He must have risked heaven and His very existence, and even all eternity. That is exactly what the Scriptures and the Spirit of Prophecy say Christ, the Son of God did do when He came to work out for us a plan of salvation from the curse of sin.[583]

Longacre agrees perfectly with White's opinion about the possibility of Christ to sin and the risk that both humanity and divinity incurred. In this brief statement, he clearly summarises the main issues at stake in the problem and the main theological concepts in the discussion. Christ coming into the world would not be real if it were impossible for him to make a mistake. Being subjected to temptation would only merely be a farce or a mockery. Consequently, it is logical to believe that the Incarnation is not a farce. It is also consistent with this reading to accept that assuming human nature would mean for Christ to be subjected to all its deficiencies. Therefore, he could yield to temptation, fall into sin, and risk heaven, his very existence, and all eternity. Longacre does not add to White's position; he simply reiterates what she has already presented, thus showing his grasp of the implications of White's infinite risk theology. He believes strongly that this is what the Scriptures teach. He also uses a terminology common in Adventism to refer to the writings of White as a prophetess, the 'Spirit of Prophecy.' Therefore, according to Longacre, this is also what White would believe. This shows his knowledge of White's writings on the topic. In his words, the Scriptures and White's writings present the concept of infinite risk, which he agrees with and finds perfectly logical. He directly supports White's opinion that Christ, the Son of God, assumed a risk when he came to save humanity from the curse of sin and that he was temptable.

Longacre, drawing from White's arguments, is very direct in saying that "If Christ 'risked all,' even

[583] Longacre, "The Deity of Christ," 13.

His eternal existence in heaven, then there was a possibility of His being overcome by sin, and if overcome by sin, He would have gone into Joseph's tomb and neither that tomb nor any other tomb would ever have been opened."[584] With a language evidently shaped by White's writings, Longacre affirms that the risk should be intended as the potential loss of Christ's eternal existence in heaven. Christ could be overcome by sin and end up in a closed tomb. Resounding White's style and views, Longacre believes that there would not have been a resurrection story, nor would anyone else have been resurrected. In this case, only one scenario becomes real: all would be lost. Christ would have suffered an eternal death and the loss of all he possessed. The same would have been true for all human beings. This would mean, in Longacre's words, that "His divinity and His humanity and heaven itself would have been 'lost - eternally lost.'"[585]

Therefore, Longacre is sure that Christ would not only lose his human life, as it happens to all human beings, but that also his divine life would then cease to exist. For this reason, capturing the problem and agreeing with White, he also talks of Christ's immutability as lost if he had failed. If Christ "had failed, His immutability as well as His eternity would have been forfeited and eternally lost."[586] Christ would have lost his eternal and divine nature. That is why, so fearlessly, Longacre says that "[i]t was possible for one of the God-head to be lost, and eternally lost."[587] This aligns with White's opinion that Christ assumed a risk in the Incarnation. "It was possible" for Christ to go out of existence forever. The cross seems to be the ultimate place where what God has always been is challenged.

Longacre supports White's view about Christ being tempted and facing the risk of eternal death. He cannot logically see the attributes of immutability and impeccability as a possible safeguard against the death of the divine person of Christ. He writes that "If Christ could have returned to heaven and been with His Father if He had failed in His humanity to overcome all the tempter's wiles, then He risked nothing but His humanity and could still have enjoyed His former divine existence with the Father."[588] As previously said, Longacre considers it a farce to believe that Christ could return to heaven without any consequence if he had sinned and if he had come only risking his humanity and not his divinity. If Christ could keep, in the words of Longacre, his "former divine

[584] Longacre, "The Deity of Christ," 14.
[585] Ibid.
[586] Ibid.
[587] Ibid.
[588] Ibid., 9.

existence" against any sin he could commit, then there would not be any risk, nor actual temptations or sacrifice.

I would emphasise that White does not elaborate further on possible scenarios after the cross, had Christ sinned and the plan of redemption been a failure. However, she clearly states what would have happened to Christ and to all human beings, namely eternal loss. Longacre seems to be sure about what could have happened even beyond the death of the Son of God. He says that "if that had happened, and it was possible to happen, God, the Father, would still have remained as the One and only absolute and living God, reigning supreme over all the unfallen worlds, but with all the human race blotted out of existence on this earth."[589] Longacre believes that God would have continued to reign over the universe with its 'unfallen worlds' inhabited by beings who have never sinned. Both White and Longacre believe in the existence of multiple worlds that did not fall into sin. White writes in this regard that the infinite price paid for salvation had its bearing also on the other created and unfallen worlds. She notes that "in this speck of a world, the heavenly universe manifests the greatest interest: for Jesus paid an infinite price for the souls of its inhabitants."[590] While this latter statement focuses its attention on the inhabitant of this speck of a world, the following one will highlight God's interest in the salvation of all the universe in the fact that Christ "endured the cross, despised the shame. He made it of small account in consideration of the results that he was working out in behalf of, not only the inhabitants of this speck of a world, but the whole universe, every world which God had created."[591] While for Longacre it seems that there is no direct correlation between the act of Christ's death on this earth and the 'destiny' of the other worlds, White sees instead a close relationship between the outcome of the plan of redemption and the future existence of other worlds and the universe itself.[592] Speculation is ground that White does

[589] Ibid., 14.

[590] HP, 359.

[591] "Christ Man's Example," RH 5 July 1887, para. 7.

[592] Further reading about White's belief in other unfallen worlds may be found in her book *Patriarchs and Prophets* (ch. 1 "Why was Sin Permitted?", ch. 29 "Satan's Enmity Against the Law") where she writes, for example, that "God's government included not only the inhabitants of heaven, but of all the worlds that He had created" (p.41); she also clearly points to the problem of the fall into sin only in this world by saying that "The controversy was not to be taken into the other worlds of the universe; but it was to be carried on in the very world, on the very same field, that Satan claimed as his" in "The Government of God," RH 9 March 1886, para. 9. In her article "The Word Made Flesh" she writes that "The plan of salvation was designed to redeem the fallen race, to give them another trial. Christ was appointed to the office of Mediator from the creation of God, set up from everlasting to be our substitute and surety. Before the world was made, it was arranged that the divinity of Christ should be enshrouded in humanity" in "The Word Made

not enter.

I would only argue in line with White that if Christ had died, not only the human race would have been lost, but the reliability and love of God would have been put at stake in the whole universe. The consequences of this are indeed beyond reasoning and tend towards dangerous conjectures. This is probably why White does not ever depict any other possible scenarios after the cross, even though she explains what failure would have meant for the destiny of Christ and the human race on this planet Earth. White is sure that Christ could be tempted, and, therefore, he could fall and share the eternal death of every human being.

6.2 Becoming Flesh: an Inexplicable Risk

Becoming flesh involved an inexplicable risk but, at the same time, revealed the depth of God's love for humanity. Moreover, if divinity were not 'fully' part of the human sacrifice on the cross, the atonement and redemption from sin would have had only a human sacrifice as a ransom and not a divine one. I may surely admit that this reasoning is much beyond human comprehension, but this is indeed what makes the Incarnation and redemption a divine mystery and the death on the cross a true sacrifice.

Consequently, a crucial question to all theologians would probably be: who and what died on the cross? Concepts such as 'immutability,' 'indivisibility,' and 'three-in-oness', as it has been shown, are challenged when considering the infinite risk scenario. The central theological concept at the core of the Trinitarian discussion, the 'triune' God, or 'three-in-one' God, implies the impossibility of God to cease to exist or be divided. As the three persons of the triune God are part of one substance, if one of the three cannot go out of existence the same must be true for all the others.

For this reason, often the crux of the discussion has been, within an orthodox Trinitarian perspective, how God could abandon God, and how there could be a splitting apart of God *within* God.[593] White's infinite risk theology challenges God's unbreakability, the idea that the Father and the Son, as one in substance, are a divinely simple, unbreakable substance. How could divinity retain

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Flesh," RH 5 April 1906, para. 13. This article explains that the Incarnation was arranged before the fall of this world; see also "The Plan of Salvation," ST 13 February 1893.

[593] Thomas H. McCall, *Forsaken: The Trinity and the Cross, and Why It Matters* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012).

existence if broken?[594] This concept of 'breaking' imperils the personhood of the divinity.[595] Therefore, the plausibility of a 'breaking' of the divinity is limited within the Trinitarian doctrine because of the full participation of the three persons in every act of the Trinity, the one substance aspect, and the personhood.[596] However, as previously demonstrated, White is sure that Christ on the cross felt the separation from his Father as possible and eternal. Moltmann's contribution is here of value when he argues that Christ, in reference to his trial and death, "was bound to experience it as rejection by the very God whom he had dared to call 'My Father' [...] And this, in full consciousness that God is close at hand in his grace, to be abandoned and delivered up to death as one rejected, is the torment of hell."[597] Although, Moltmann argues for a separation "to the utmost degree of enmity and distinction"[598] he thinks of this on an experiential and emotional level, more than ontologically. The argument is not developed in the direction of Incarnational reality. In Moltmann's words, Father and Son become respectively sonless and fatherless[599] , and the cross is the place where the identities of both are negotiated as they are such because of their relationship itself.[600] However, even if claiming that "[t]he deity of his God and Father is at stake,"[601] as well as the deity of the Son because the relationship between them is compromised by the abandonment, and advocating for an abandonment of the Son by the Father, Moltmann keeps claiming for a divine unity as something happening "within God himself; it is *stasis* within God - 'God against God.'"[602] This advocating for an unbreakable view is common to theological reasoning.

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[594] See also Adam J. Johnson, *Atonement: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 69–87.

[595] See McCall, *Forsaken: The Trinity and the Cross, and Why It Matters,* 33-37. It is also here relevant the concept or doctrine of the *Opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisia* (the inseparable operations of the Trinity). See also Matthew W. Bates, *The Birth of the Trinity: Jesus, God, and Spirit in New Testament and Early Christian Interpretations of the Old Testament* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 126–135.

[596] See also Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, esp. 176–178.

[597] Moltmann, *The Crucified God,* 147-148. In the same book, Moltmann argues that Christ was then left to experience a form of rejection made acute by the conscious knowledge of God's proximity. Most of all, he is convinced of considering the "totality of the person of Christ" (p.206) against Christological approaches which tend to create a distinction between the two natures of Christ in relation to the concept of forsakenness. In this sense, Moltmann highlights the relationship between the Father and Son as crucial to the understanding of the cry of dereliction, more than the question of his human nature.

[598] Ibid., 152.

[599] Ibid., 151. I argue that Christ's cry of abandonment loses its precise contours in Moltmann. His idea of abandonment fades into a cry that expresses fidelity to God in the sense of both Father and Son. This cry becomes a self-pointing one. It is a question of self-forsakenness which consequently highlights the unity between Father and Son.

[600] Ibid., 241-249. In the *Way of Jesus Christ,* Moltmann states: "For a brief moment I forsook you, so that you might become the brother of forsaken human beings [...] I did not forsake you eternally, but was beside you in your heart", 180.

[601] Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 151.

[602] Ibid.

The same problem arises with the idea of Christ being incapable of sin (impeccability). It seems to contradict the concept of Christ overcoming sin directly. How could he overcome it if he could not commit it? Consequently, temptations were not truly such, and Christ would only play a role in a 'safe environment.' There is always a real danger to belittling what God has done through his Son for the salvation of humanity. And, certainly, the cross is the place where all mysteries about God converge.[603] These arguments are central to the analysis of the concept of 'infinite risk.'

However, much remains inexplicable. The 'joining' or 'blending' of the human and divine natures in the person of Christ is beyond human comprehension. This has brought, even in early Christianity, to several different theological opinions. Some have believed that Christ's human appearance was merely phantasmal or that divinity entered the earthly body of the natural son of Joseph and Mary at baptism. Consequently, it was also believed that divinity vacated the body of the human Christ at the moment of death. Docetism, Gnosticism, and other currents of thought promoted these and other views contradicting the Scriptures.[604] Some concepts went as far as to believe that Christ could not be part of the world because it is evil; therefore, he should have been no real man. There has been an effort to deny the real assumption of human nature because of its innate evil value. In this sense, the Incarnation has been minimised. This has led to believe in a distinction between the Son of God and the earthly Jesus of Nazareth, or that the Son of God, with his divine nature, indwelled the human Jesus only for a limited time, perhaps between baptism and arrest. Christianity fought against these opinions, though influences of these may be seen at times in certain theological developments of the Trinity doctrine even nowadays.

All of these views had, generally, a common problem, that of tending to disjoin the human and divine natures. This was done in order to give a sense to the death of Christ by avoiding the problem of considering that the divinity could have committed a sin and paid its consequences. Trinitarian views today tend to do the same. Paradoxically, with the concept of 'hypostatic union,' there is generally a dismissal of the influence or role of humanity over divinity in the sacrifice of Christ. There is no consideration of the possibility that the divine nature could be at risk in the assumed human nature of Christ. This road may lead to the belief that there was no real sacrifice, real pain, or actual

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[603] See Fred Sanders, "Introduction to Christology: Chalcedonian Categories for the Gospel Narrative," in *Jesus in Trinitarian Perspective: An Introductory Christology* (ed. Fred Sanders and Klaus Issler; Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2007), 1-41 (esp. 8).

[604] See John William C. Wand, *A History of the Early Church to A.D. 500* (New York, NY - London: Routledge, 1963).

death. This would not be far from the early Christian centuries' views presented above. The message of the Gospel itself may be belittled because the redemption of man would not imply any real responsibility on the part of God. This would also conceal the depth of God's love revealed, instead, in his willingness to allow the Son to assume a risk involving his ceasing to exist. Only in this case the Father would truly give his own Son.

Therefore, there is a real problem in believing that the plan of redemption was actually without risk for the Godhead. At the same time, I cautiously expand on White's Christological views of Christ's infinite risk. The claim that Christ could die even as a divine being if he had sinned is certainly audacious for many current theologies. Indeed, inexplicable in many respects. But, the opposite would mean that sin does not really bring to death. In this case, the reality of sin and its consequences are obscured. Immortality becomes the only option, perhaps even for human beings. Why would Christ remain alive if he had sinned? Why would he not be condemned while the other human beings would? Many believe that even human beings will never die, whether living forever in the bliss of heaven or suffering forever in the torment of hell. Consequently, there is no death, not for God nor for humankind.

6.3 Concluding Remarks: What if the Words of Christ on the Cross were His Last?

It is essential at this point to recapitulate some of the main elements of this theological analysis. Therefore, these final remarks constitute a space to 'think aloud' about the complexity of the Christological questions raised by White's theology of infinite risk. Thus, I intend here to think with White again about what (could have) happened at the cross if Christ (had) sinned. In this space, thinking about the cross as the place and time for Christ's last words is challenging. Thus, what if Christ's cry, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" was his last word? As it has been shown, White is consistent regarding the infinite risk taken by Christ. There is not ever a change in her writings about this belief. [605] She finds it highly important to the point that she keeps writing about

[605] In a letter written in 1905, just a few years before her death, to her young grand-daughter Mable White, White talks of the consistency of her writings: "I am now looking over my diaries and copies of letters written for several years back, commencing before I went to Europe, before you were born. I have the most precious matter to reproduce and place before the people in testimony form. While I am able to do this work, the people must have these things to revive past history, that they may see that there is one straight chain of truth, without one heretical sentence, in that which I have written" Lt 329a, 16 November 1905, para. 3 (20LtMs; to Mabel White; see also 8MR No. 532).

it on various occasions throughout her life. This attests to her interest that this theological point could be well understood.

However, the history of Christology, as the investigation of the nature and work of Christ and its relation to the doctrine of the Trinity, is long and complex. This is true both in Christianity at large and within Adventism.[606] There are a number of challenges to the interfacing of White's Christology with the wider scholarship in modern theology and also within Adventism, so continued study is necessary. Long periods of debates about the divine and human nature of Christ, the concept of the Trinity (or Godhead), and other related topics have resulted in various views. White's Christological examination may constitute a challenging voice in this space, as well as contribute to thinking afresh about consolidated theological concepts. Consequently, I intended to provide both a place for White's views in the broader theological dialogue and to give proper emphasis to a very specific Christological view, her theology of infinite risk.

This has necessitated a conceptual plexus from where the analysis could move towards the development of a systematic approach to some of the main Christological issues related to the concept of the eternal death of Christ as a divine being, such as the union of the divine and human natures, the implication of the Incarnation, the natures of Christ at his death, intra-Trinitarian life, Christ's im/peccability, God's indivisibility, God's immutability and impassibility, the relevance of the Law, and Christ's atoning sacrifice, among others. These crucial theological points have been challenged or called into the discussion by analysing White's views of what happened at the cross.

The question of what happened at the cross is a central Christological question. It intends to consider also what could have happened if Christ had not successfully completed his redemptive sacrifice. Moreover, it introduces a concept often foreign to incarnational theology: humanity and divinity eternally united in Christ. In other words, White's incarnational model presents the Incarnation as an irreversible process of which the 'risk' is the primary evidence. At the same time, her concept of a 'veiled' divinity offers ground to think afresh about the leading role of human

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[606] See also, besides previously cited Adventist contributions, Taylor C. Mathewson, *The Doctrine of the Personality of the Holy Spirit as Taught by the Seventh-day Adventist Church up to 1900* (B.D. thesis, Andrews University, 1953); Erwin R. Gane, *The Arian or Anti-trinitarian Views Presented in Seventh-day Adventist Literature and the Ellen G. White Answer* (M.A. thesis, Andrews University, 1963; available at http://www.sdanet.org/atissue/trinity/gane-thesis/index.htm); Russell Holt, *The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination: Its Rejection and Acceptance* (Term paper, Andrews University, June 2, 1969); Burt D. Merlin, *Demise of Semi-Arianism and Anti-Trinitarianism in Adventist Theology, 1888–1957,* (Research Paper: Andrews University, December 1996).

nature in the Incarnation. This may shed light on how White understands what happened when humanity and divinity joined in the Incarnation and how it may be possible for the Son of God to go out of existence.

In a sense, her 'agenda' on this belief is firstly hortatory and then theological. She writes about it to encourage people to have the same love of and for Christ. She reasons about it so that people may see the value of what God has done to save fallen human beings. The concept of infinite risk is not a tiny issue, nor does it occupy a 'side' position. This is also the reason why she often invites her readers to 'remember' the great cost and the high risk involved in the sacrifice on the cross. She explains it and, in this way, defends it so that none may have a wrong understanding of what truly happened at the cross. White's infinite risk theology has implications for how one understands the love of God and the value of humanity. It is also strictly connected with the consequences and potential consequences of the Incarnation, especially in reference to Christ's passion and death. It furthermore implies thinking about the resurrection as a probability and not an assurance, and a closed tomb as a real risk. This rich and intertwined cluster of ideas constituting White's infinite theology more broadly has been at the core of the investigation.

I am certainly aware of the still greater theological field open to future research. However, this analysis aimed to produce a constructive proposal and a contribution to the specific scholarly field, as well as a critical analysis of the theological contribution of White. In this regard, it is clear that for White, the cross represents more than a moment of suffering and feelings of forsakenness. It is the potential scenario of an eternal death, even for the divine Son of God. For White, the Incarnation produces such an irreversible union between divinity and humanity that the experience of the cross and burial is proleptic anticipation of the potential experience of the eternal loss of both human and divine nature.

I agree with Sanders that "Christology is an interdisciplinary theological project" that requires different perspectives and "to think rightly about the Trinity, the incarnation, or the atonement […] all at once and in relation to each other."[607] These interconnected topics are extremely vast to be treated individually and even more "all at once." However, the study of White's theology of infinite risk implicitly contemplated many Christological issues related to the Trinity, the Incarnation, and

[607] Sanders, "Introduction to Christology: Chalcedonian Categories for the Gospel Narrative" in *Jesus in Trinitarian Perspective*, 2.

the atonement. The task has been challenging and not exhaustive. But, it is widely accepted that Christology is one of the most difficult doctrines of all theology, perhaps second only to Trinity.

Therefore, while it may be reasonable to comprehend Christology within the framework of Trinitarian theology, the complexity of elucidating these two challenging doctrines concurrently is apparent. For this reason, albeit with varying degrees of tangential intersections, the research aimed to delve into White's Christology in intimate conjunction with Trinitarian concepts and beyond. Thus, I endeavoured to set the parameters of the investigation, situated within the already vast field of Christology, specifically targeting the intricate issue – as articulated – of the infinite risk undertaken by Christ in his Incarnation, given the challenges posed by White's perspective on the matter. Consequently, recognizing the significance of comprehending this phenomenon within its intrinsic context became evident. This challenging concept has also been placed within the broad soteriological frame of the death of Christ, and this has been the theological landscape in which White's interpretation found its place.

Consequently, it has been crucial to take the cross as the starting point of this investigation to understand – through a reverse movement – questions of Incarnation, Trinity, and more. Understanding how humanity and divinity joined at the cross may shed light on how they joined at conception and birth. How humanity and divinity faced the cross has offered the space for a deeper understanding of both natures and God. How Christ accepted and accomplished the sacrifice on the cross has opened avenues to understand the nature of sin, its consequences and atonement.

The 'risk scenario' is undoubtedly far from Christological and Trinitarian discussions today, and Adventist theology seems to significantly disregard White's infinite risk theology towards compliance with widespread accepted Trinitarian doctrines. However, the research has argued that the absence of real risk in the Incarnation is what White tends to avoid, as this would eclipse the magnitude of the sacrifice of Christ because it fails to reveal how far he has been willing to go to save humankind.

If Trinitarian theology teaches that only Christ's human nature could be subjected to death, what then would the risk be? In this sense, the Incarnation of the pre-existing Son of God would see only the human nature dying on the cross. On the contrary, the risk would imply that the divine nature would die together with the human one if Christ had sinned. Therefore, divinity surrendered to humanity in the incarnated person of Christ. This concept confirms White's idea that, while on the

cross, Christ could not see beyond the grave and felt that sin could have separated him eternally from the Father. Christ's cry on the Cross, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?," was then prompted by the fear that the Father had forever left him.[608] In this case, dereliction is a sort of infinite risk prolepsis, the anticipation of what could have happened.

White's infinite risk theology reveals God's love in a way beyond human understanding. Christ's Incarnation reveals how his divinity surrendered to his humanity to the point that the grave could have kept him forever if he had sinned. This inexplicable risk is the revelation of God's love. It sheds a different light on the question of atonement by implying a divine sacrifice together with the human one. By declaring that Christ could sin, infinite risk theology also unveils the eternal separation that could have happened at the cross between the Father and the Son.

For White, God did not only offer his Son as an atoning sacrifice for the salvation of humanity, but he was willing to let him partake of human nature to the point of letting him go out of existence if he had committed even only a single sin. This unaddressed concept may actually have a crucial impact on how one understands the limitless love of God for all humanity. Ultimately, the story of redemption could have gone differently if Christ had sinned. His tomb would have remained closed, and the Son of God would have been eternally separated from the communion with the Father and eventually die with the rest of humanity. The answer to the initial question – the very *raison d'être* of this research, "Could the divine Son of God incarnate risk his eternal existence, losing himself forever with all humankind?" – is undoubtedly a positive one in White's view. However, it remains a problematic question rarely considered or discussed, an intriguing dilemma less explored, underestimated, and even neglected in Christological debates. In fact, not often, if not at all, the cross is understood as in need of a risk to be indeed a sacrifice.

In a theological landscape characterized by diverse and sometimes conflicting Christological perspectives, White presents a potential Gospel narrative without the resurrection. She envisions a scenario where the divine Son of God jeopardizes his eternal existence, willingly embracing permanent nonexistence and sharing the destiny of fallen humanity. White posits that the outcome of Christ's mission was not pre-determined. She rejects the notion of pre-determined success and introduces a real possibility of failure at the crucifixion. She contends that the incarnate Son of God, Christ, could potentially commit sin and be subject to permanent death, introducing an element of

[608] See more on this topic in 5.3 "Could the Tomb Remain Closed?"

'mutability' as his divine nature remains open to a form of 'change.' All of these theological views may indeed change the perspectives with which one looks at the cross and, more broadly, at the sacrifice of Christ and the economy of salvation. This may undoubtedly have consequences for Trinitarian theology and Incarnation doctrines and urge to rethink even atonement theories and much more. The infinite risk theology indeed catalyses many of the doctrinal and theological questions mentioned in this work. It contributes to these and other Christological and Trinitarian questions, whether directly or implicitly.

Therefore, while this investigation certainly acknowledges White's departure from traditional orthodoxy, it mainly aims to highlight the distinctive nature of White's theology of infinite risk and its impact on various doctrinal and theological questions. The acknowledgement of her views challenging traditional positions does not inherently imply an endorsement of their superiority. Nonetheless, even if the focus is on presenting and examining White's theological framework rather than making a definitive judgment about its superiority, the research aptly acknowledges and commends the creatively logical and valuable coherence of White's biblical exegesis, skilfully navigating a close-to-the-text analysis that remains unencumbered by subsequent theological and philosophical elaborations and explores potential scenarios that may naturally flow from scholarly investigation.

In conclusion, in a period coinciding with the end of White's ministry, Terrot R. Glover (1869-1943), a Cambridge University classicist and son of a Baptist minister, writes – in his *The Jesus of History* (1917) – a relevant reflection on Christ's Passion. This may further highlight the complexity of understanding what happened at the cross. He highlights that the cry "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" posits a crucial question to all Christians, whose exploration of potential answers should not lose sight of the fact that the incomprehensible pain of Christ's Passion is firstly the result of his free choice. He writes,

> What pain must that have involved? What is the value of the cry, '*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*' When we have answered, each for himself, these questions, and others like them that will suggest themselves — answered them by the most earnest efforts of which our natures are capable — and remembered at the end how far our natures fall short of his, and told ourselves that our answers are insufficient—then let us recall, once more, that he chose all this.[609]

[609] Terrot R. Glover, *The Jesus of History* (New York, NY: George H. Doran Company, 1917), 167.

Thus, it may be relevant here to acknowledge that if answers may be insufficient to clarify all that Christ's death implies, at least they may contribute to a greater understanding of God's love towards humankind while furthering an ever deeper search for comprehension. White's theology of infinite risk provides an opportunity for examining the divine actions undertaken for the entirety of humanity. Christ's sacrifice on the cross and his last words are not only the expression of the unbearable pain inflicted on his body. They are the reflection of the inner anguish of an objective forsakenness and a potential eternal separation.[610] White's infinite risk theology casts a distinct perspective on the salvific actions undertaken by divinity for humanity. As White would say, Christ "has paid so infinite a price"[611] and therefore, Christians should "stand before the cross of Calvary, and learn from it the cost of redemption."[612]

Ultimately, White would argue that the Father allowed His Son to face the danger of life that everyone must face, and to engage in the conflict that every human being must engage in, even at the cost of failure and the risk of eternal loss. She would posit that Christ left all to save humanity and became an exile from heaven, and would have experienced the same kind of divine wrath that befell Adam, if he had sinned, sharing the death that would have fallen upon all humanity. The tomb would not have been opened if even one small transgression had marred Christ's character. The world would have perished under the weight of its own guilt, and the Gospel would not have told the story of a resurrection. Christ could have been the prisoner of divine justice in the grave as he assumed responsibility for the violation of the Law, running the risk of losing his own life forever.

Challenged by the questions raised by Christ's Incarnation and sacrifice, White writes,

> go to Gethsemane, and there watch with Christ through those hours of anguish, when He sweat as it were great drops of blood. Look upon the Saviour uplifted on the cross. Hear that despairing cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Look upon the wounded

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[610] The relation between the two natures of Christ has been often at the centre of debates reasoning from which of the two natures, or if from both, the cry could have originated. Consequently, in which nature was Christ consciously living the experience of suffering. Generally, it hardly finds a sense to hold opinions which may somehow dismiss Christ's physical pain and psychological stress in light of a supposed dichotomy between human and divine nature in the single person of Christ. Boettner, for example, writes what appears to be a clear-cut approach to the two natures of Christ picturing "His divine nature during the crucifixion as not only fully sympathetic with His human nature, but as looking down upon His human nature calmly and serenely as the moon in its majesty looks down upon the troubled sea," Loraine Boettner, *The Atonement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1941), 30 (see especially ch.3 "Satisfaction View of the Atonement").

[611] Lt 7, 10 February 1885.

[612] "Fragments/Work in the South," Ms 66, 28 July 1901, para. 16.

head, the pierced side, the marred feet. Remember that Christ risked all. For our redemption, heaven itself was imperiled. [613]

For White, Gethsemane becomes the first place to start looking for answers. This is where one may start thinking about Christ's hours of anguish and the meaning of his death. Moreover, the despairing cry, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?", points to remembering that "Christ risked all" by putting "heaven itself" in peril for the redemption of humankind. She posits that the value God places on a soul is evident in Christ's willingness to sacrifice his own life, even risking his eternal existence, to save even a single human being.[614] Thus, she conveys the gravity of Christ's ultimate words as if they were truly his final ones.

Consequently, White asserts that God's love defies quantification. Thus, she invites her readers to "[t]hink deeply upon the love the Father has manifested in our behalf, the love that He has expressed for us. We cannot measure this love. Measurement there is none. We can only point to Calvary, to the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. It is an infinite sacrifice. Can we comprehend and measure infinity?"[615] Emphasizing its immeasurable nature, White characterizes Christ's sacrifice as infinite. Raising the rhetorical question of whether the human intellect is genuinely capable of comprehending and quantifying infinity, the comprehension of Christ's infinite risk persists as an ongoing intellectual inquiry.

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[613] COL, 196.

[614] "Remember that Christ risked all; 'tempted like as we are,' he staked even his own eternal existence upon the issue of the conflict. Heaven itself was imperiled for our redemption. At the foot of the cross, remembering that for one sinner Jesus would have yielded up his life, we may estimate the value of a soul," in "Seeking the Lost," para. 23.

[615] "The Only True Mediator," Ms 128, 28 November 1897, para. 14 (12LtMs); see also previous editions in ST 28 June 1899, para. 8, and BE 1 May 1899, par. 7.

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[616] A 'collection' of Ellen G. White's writings is a comprehensive anthology of her works which usually includes specific genre of literature, e.g. her letters, her manuscripts, her articles, etc., at times with indexes and/or contextual and descriptive annotations. The official website https://m.egwwritings.org offers specific descriptions of the different genre of White's writings.

[617] A 'compilation' is a curated selection of her works that typically includes excerpts, passages, or chapters from her books, articles, letters, and manuscripts, focusing on specific themes, topics, or subjects of interest. These compilations serve as condensed resources, providing readers with insights into White's teachings and perspectives.

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