

The Great Controversy and the Problem of Evil

By Richard Rice

Once heard someone say you could outline the history of Christian thought by tracing the various interpretations of Romans down through the years. This certainly seems true if we recall the impact of Paul's longest letter on the lives of Martin Luther, John Wesley, and Karl Barth, to mention just a few. I suspect that biblical apocalyptic has played a similar role in Adventist history.

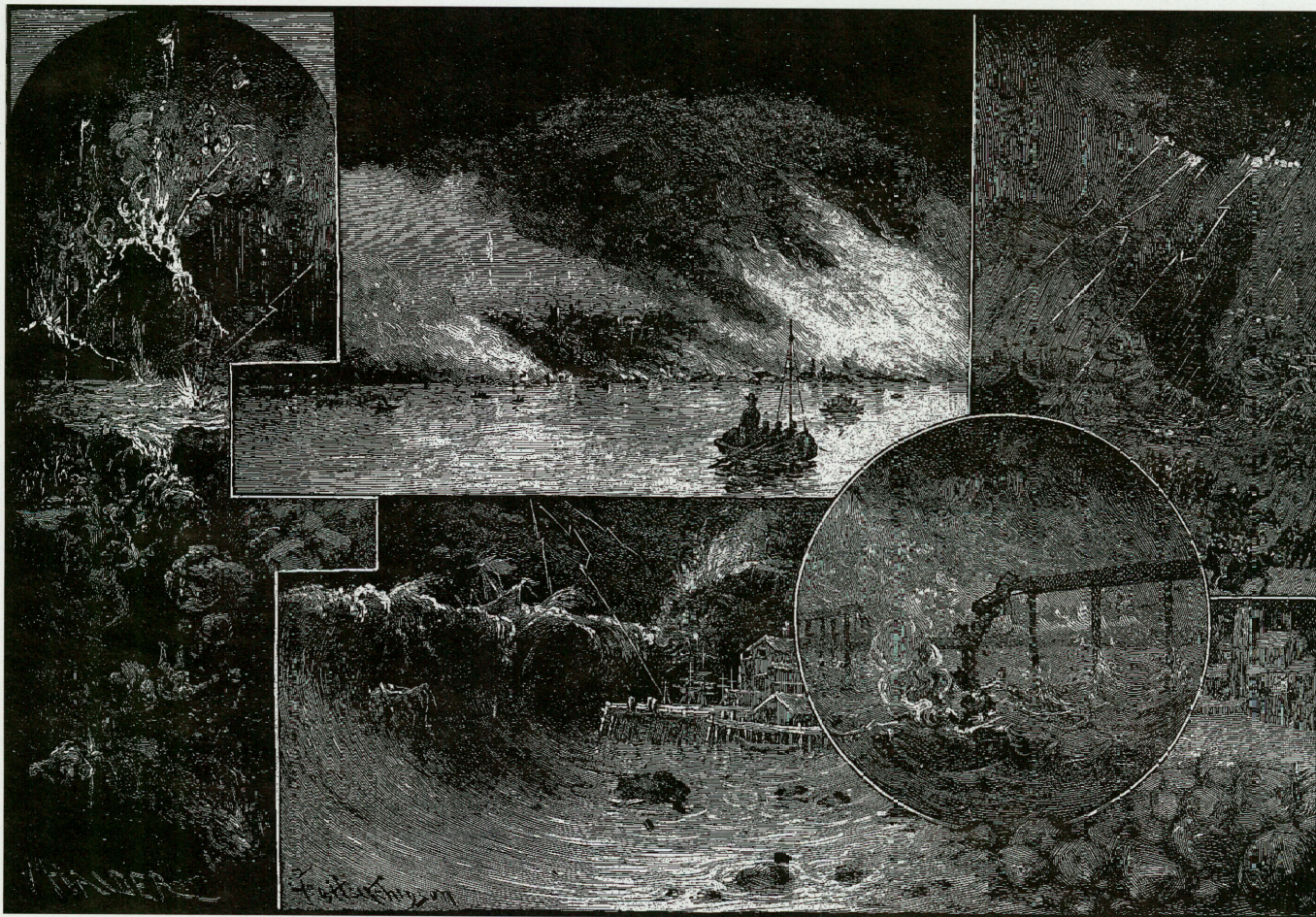
From their beginnings, as the commentaries of Uriah Smith and others show, Adventists have found in Daniel and Revelation a philosophy of history, a chronology of final events, and a mandate for our existence as a religious movement. More recently, a variety of Adventist scholars, including, among others, Roy Branson, Kendra Haloviak, John Paulien, Chuck Scriven, and Charles Teel, summon us to the ethical challenges they contain. By announcing the end of the present order, they expose the pretensions of principalities and powers, and summon us to live as citizens of God's kingdom, not the kingdoms of this world.

The cosmic struggle depicted in Revelation provided Ellen White with her most important theological concept. She employs the theme of the great controversy to interpret the essential elements of Christian faith, as well as the distinctive concerns of Adventists. She also applies it to the problem of evil.

According to the preface, one of her objectives in writing *The Great Controversy*, was to "present a satisfactory solution of the great problem of evil."¹ Our goal here is to examine the contours of Ellen White's "theodicy."² What understanding of evil does she derive from biblical apocalyptic? How does it compare to other types of theodicy? What questions does it raise?³

The Devil appears infrequently in contemporary philosophical discussions of the problem of evil. Alvin Plantinga and, following him, Stephen T. Davis, describe the figure of Satan, the fallen angel Lucifer, as a potential explanation for natural evil.⁴ (The expression *luciferous* is that of Stephen Davis.) But their descriptions of Lucifer's demonic activity are rather brief and incidental to the overall position they develop.

A recent discussion seeks to correct this lack of emphasis. In two lengthy books, *God at War* and *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, Gregory A. Boyd argues that a "warfare worldview"



overcomes the shortcomings of classical theodicies.⁵ But I know of no one who develops the idea more extensively than Ellen White.

An Overview of Ellen White's Theodicy

In brief, Ellen White interprets evil within the framework of a cosmic conflict in which the figure of Satan plays a central role. The background of the conflict is God's creative love and its ultimate resolution will be the fulfillment of God's loving purpose for creation.

Because he is infinite love, God created beings with the capacity to appreciate his character and to love him freely in return. This action involved a risk, however, because creatures who are free to love are free to withhold love and rebel against their maker. Sadly, this is what happened, and this creaturely rebellion is the cause of all suffering. The rebellion is temporary, however. Eventually, sin and sinners will be eradicated and as a result of this "terrible experiment" with evil no one will ever again question God's love and authority. The universe will be secure from all further rebellion.

The Devil plays a central role in every phase of this scenario. As Ellen White describes it, evil originated in the universe sometime before the creation of the earth with the rebellion of Lucifer, the highest created being. Lucifer was the head of the angelic host and the covering cherub who served in the very presence of God. Given his lofty position and great intelligence, he had deep insight into the nature of God.

Yet at some point in time, Lucifer mysteriously began to resent God's authority. He nursed his dissatisfaction until he was convinced that God was unfair, and then decided that he could no longer serve God. Lucifer also aroused the suspicions of his fellow angels. He portrayed God as a tyrant unworthy of their loyalty and eventually persuaded one-third of the heavenly host to join him in rejecting God's authority. When their opposition ripened into open revolt, they were cast out of heaven.

With this expulsion, the central stage in this cosmic drama shifted to this earth, where Satan sought to spread

his rebellion by getting Adam and Eve to reject God's sovereignty. God endowed humans with essentially the same freedom the angels enjoyed, forbidding them to eat from "the tree of knowledge of good and evil."⁶

Speaking through the serpent in Eden, Satan persuaded Eve—and through her, Adam—to question God's benevolence and to eat the forbidden fruit. With this act of disloyalty to God, humans lost their sovereignty over the earth to the Devil. Since then, Satan and his angels have been busy wreaking havoc on the earth.

So the Devil is ultimately responsible for everything that threatens human life and well-being. He is the original source of all suffering—from natural disasters and organic diseases to personal sin in all its manifestations, including pride, self-indulgence, cruelty, crime, and war. Beneath the veneer of human activity, the essence of history consists in the conflict between God and Satan as they pursue their contrasting objectives for the earth and each attempts to counteract and undermine the work of the other.

An obvious question is why God allowed the Devil to persist in his rebellion. Why didn't God destroy him, or at least prevent him from harming other creatures? Why was he permitted to extend his rebellion, to foment dissatisfaction among other angels, to tempt Adam and Eve and wreak havoc on the newly created earth?

This question brings us to the most important aspect Ellen White's luciferous theodicy—the idea of an onlooking universe. As she conceives it, this earth is an arena where God and the Devil are vying, not just for the souls of human beings, but for the allegiance of the entire universe. The universe contains a great number of moral beings. The unfallen angels and inhabitants of other worlds are carefully watching the conflict between good and evil in human history in order to determine whether or not God deserves their complete loyalty.

So Lucifer's rebellion had far-reaching consequences. He not only succeeded in getting many others to join his revolt, his charges against God had a powerful effect on those who did not. Though not outwardly rebellious, they harbored lingering doubts about God's character. Perhaps Lucifer was right, they wondered, and God really is a tyrant. Perhaps they were serving God only because they didn't know any better. Perhaps human misery was the result of

divine mismanagement or, worse, divine cruelty.

Even though Lucifer's direct assault on God failed, he achieved a victory of sorts anyway. His accusations put God in a bind. If God summarily destroyed him, this would confirm Lucifer's accusations. God would then appear to be just what Lucifer claimed he was, a despot who keeps his creatures submissive by concealing his true character. So instead of destroying Lucifer, God had to let him live. The only way to relieve the doubts of the onlooking universe was to allow the principles of rebellion to ripen until their self-destructive consequences were clear for all to see.

The central issue in the great controversy, then, is the character of God, or, more precisely, the creaturely perception of God. To bring the controversy to an end, God must not only eradicate evil, he must do it in a way that is clearly consistent with love. What the onlooking universe needs, then, is a vivid display of the nature of sin and the character of God.

When the host of unfallen beings finally sees that Lucifer's charges are unfounded, that God is supremely loving and worthy of worship, Satan's cause will lose all its sympathizers and God can finally destroy it. In order to provide "an eternal basis of security," God gave Satan time to develop his principles, "that they might be seen by the heavenly universe."⁷

The plan of salvation represents God's response to Satan's charges. The incarnation and the crucifixion of God's own Son clearly manifest God's love and show that Satan's charges against God are a lie. It is his dominion that rests on cruelty and tyranny. His accusations against God are but the projection of his own qualities.

For Ellen White, the cross was the turning point in the great controversy, and it benefits the entire universe. Before Christ's death, Satan's deceptions were so effective that none of the creatures fully understood the nature of his rebellion. But his hostility to Christ tore away Satan's disguise and revealed him as a murderer.

When he shed the blood of God's Son, "The last link of sympathy between Satan and the heavenly world was broken." So, "All heaven triumphed in the Saviour's victory. Satan was defeated, and knew that his kingdom was lost." Even with this, however, the onlooking universe had things to learn, so the controversy continues. "The angels did not even then understand all that was involved in the controversy."⁸ As human history runs its course, however, the nature of rebellion will be fully understood, and when that happens, God will eradicate sin forever. "Satan and all who

have joined him in rebellion will be cut off. Sin and sinners will perish, root and branch.”⁹

The concept of the great controversy thus explains the final judgment. It shows that the destruction of the wicked “is not an act of arbitrary power on the part of God,” “but the inevitable result of sin.” “The rejecters of His mercy reap that which they have sown.”¹⁰ The final judgment is not a display of divine vengeance, but the natural destiny of those who remove themselves from the source of all life.

God could not destroy Satan and his followers

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when the controversy began without leaving doubts in the minds of the unlooking universe. But when the plan of redemption is complete, God’s character will be revealed to all created intelligences, and then “the extermination of sin will vindicate God’s love.”¹¹

We have in Ellen White, then, an emphatically luciferous theodicy.¹² The figure of the Devil is not just one feature in her response to the problem of evil, it is central to it. He instigated a conflict of cosmic proportions, and he bears final responsibility for all evil and suffering. He is to blame for all the ills we experience. At the same time, human suffering serves an important purpose: It contributes to the cosmic drama that will eventually vindicate the character of God and insure the eternal security of the universe.

What does the great controversy represent as a theodicy? How does this sweeping account of the world’s history compare to other responses to the problem of evil? To etch its contours a bit more sharply, it may be helpful to view it in relation to the familiar types of theodicy that John Hick develops.¹³

Ellen G. White’s Theodicy Compared

Ellen White’s views on evil resemble both Augustinian and Irenaean theodicies in certain ways. On the Augustinian side, she affirms the absurdity of sin and attributes its origin to the exercise of creaturely freedom. On the Irenaean side, she places great emphasis on character development and construes evil as the occasion for a valuable learning experience.

One Augustinian element is the idea that evil origi-

nated in a historical fall from perfection, indeed, from the highest level of creaturely perfection. Another is the idea that sin is inexplicable and incomprehensible. “Sin is an intruder,” she asserts, “for whose presence no reason can be given. It is mysterious, unaccountable.”¹⁴

We find a third Augustinian element in the value Ellen White places on creaturely freedom. A universe containing morally free beings, she maintains, is superior to one without it. “God desires from all His creatures the service of love—homage that springs from an intelligent appreciation of His character. He takes no

pleasure in a forced allegiance, and to all He grants freedom of will.”¹⁵

There are also elements in Ellen White’s account that resemble John Hick’s “Irenaean” or “soul-making” theodicy. As she describes it, human beings were created sinless, but not mature. They needed a period of time to develop their characters and become everything they were meant to be. “God made [them] free moral agents, capable of appreciating ... His character and ... with full liberty to yield or to withhold obedience.... Before they could be rendered eternally secure, their loyalty must be tested.”¹⁶

For Irenaean theodicy, according to Hick, the fall was inevitable. Instead of a catastrophic catapult from perfection to perdition, the fall was more like a learning experience, an important step in growing toward maturity. As we have seen, Ellen White condemns sin as inexcusable and rejects the notion that God is in any way responsible for it. But she maintains that the fall of Adam and Eve was different from that of Lucifer. It was disastrous, but not quite as disastrous.

Lucifer enjoyed a full revelation of God’s character. He knew the full depth of God’s love and goodness, so his rebellion was irreversible. There was nothing God could do for him. But Adam and Eve did not know God in the same way. Furthermore, their picture of God was clouded by Satan’s deceptions. So for them there was hope. A fuller revelation of God’s love could win them back.¹⁷

Another Irenaean feature in Ellen White’s theodicy





is the contribution that a challenging environment can make to moral development. For her as for John Hick, character development was essential to God's design for human beings.¹⁸ Though the fall was not inevitable, it resulted in an environment that was beneficial to moral growth. When Adam and Eve yielded to temptation human nature was depraved, and they needed the discipline that only hardship could provide. Filled with sorrows as it is, this world is a "vale of soul-making."¹⁹

the universe is immune to rebellion now in a way that it was not before. The plan of redemption "vindicate[s] the character of God before the universe."²⁰ And "a tested and proved creation will never again be turned from allegiance to Him whose character has been fully manifested . . . as fathomless love and infinite wisdom."²¹

Ellen White's theodicy also differs from Irenaean versions in several important ways. For her, the fall was not inevitable, and God is in no sense responsible

Ellen White comes closest to an Irenaean theodicy with her view that evil leads to benefits that would not otherwise have been realized. And the primary benefit involves the onlooking universe. As a result of the great controversy, she maintains, God's creation achieves complete security. Once sin has been tried, and everyone can see how terrible it is, God will destroy it with everyone's approval, and no one will ever be foolish enough to try it again.

At the same time, however, she never says that evil is inevitable—that in a universe of morally free creatures, someone is bound to rebel sooner or later. Nor does she say that the net effect of evil is positive, that the gains outweigh the losses in the final analysis. It is not her view that evil is somehow "worth it," no matter how bad it is. (She consistently refers to it as a "terrible experiment.") Nor does she say that the universe could not have achieved security in any other way.

All she says is that

for sin. Moreover, not everyone will be saved. The universe will eventually be populated with beings who serve God freely. But unlike Hick's account, this is not because God finally wins everyone over. It is because he destroys all opposition. As we have seen, he can do this without arousing suspicion because he waits until the loyal followers have no sympathy left for rebellion.

Like most Christian theodicies, Ellen White's combines the notion of a fall that originates in creaturely freedom with the idea that evil contributes to the achievement of something good. What distinguishes her theodicy is the way she seems to expand the threat that evil poses to the universe while narrowing the likelihood of its occurrence.

For many theodicies it is understandable, if not excusable, for evil to arise in a universe where there is freedom. Sooner or later rebellion is bound to occur somewhere, and many people think it was part of God's plan that it do so. But the consequences of evil are "manageable." Either all evil is ultimately redeemed, or there is at least a guaranteed preponderance of good over evil.²²

For Ellen White, in contrast, universal catastrophe was a real possibility: conceivably, creation could reject God's sovereignty entirely, join in rebellion, and leave God's plans in tatters. If we ask why God would go ahead and create in the face of this possibility, the answer may be that the original likelihood of evil was very small. God created beings with a capacity to love, God knew that they could rebel, but it was never God's plan that they actually would, and God did everything he could to prevent it, short of eliminating freedom.

Ellen White and the Book of Revelation

Ellen White's luciferous theodicy raises a variety of interesting questions—biblical, historical, and philosophical. One obvious question is the relation of her apocalyptic vision to the vision of the Apocalypse itself. For both, human history is the stage for a divine-demonic conflict of cosmic proportions. The final phase of this struggle will bring human history to an end and establish God's reign on the earth forever. But Ellen White's interpretation of the conflict differs from the book of Revelation in some interesting ways.

To the original readers (hearers) of Revelation, as to the biblical communities of faith in general, God's

very sovereignty appears to be at stake. Their question was whether God has the power to overcome the evil forces that dominate human life and wreak havoc with God's people. The book's answer is a resounding Yes! God will defeat his foes in a climactic battle and utterly destroy them in a lake of fire.

A related question is why, if God has the power to destroy the wicked, he doesn't go ahead and do it. How much longer can he tolerate the persecution of his people?²³ For Ellen White, in contrast, the crucial question is not whether or when God will destroy the wicked, but why God destroys them at all. How can a God of love end the existence of any of his creatures?²⁴

From Ellen White's perspective, there is no question that God is infinitely superior to his opponents. Since God's power is the ultimate source of every creature's life, the fundamental force that upholds everything, he could end anyone's existence in an instant. For her, the fundamental issue of the great controversy is not God's power at all, but God's character, or more precisely, God's reputation.

Ellen White's reluctance to attribute judgment to God also appears in her account of human suffering at the end of time. According to Revelation 16, angels sent from God pour out their vials on an unrepentant world. But in her description of the time of trouble, Ellen White asserts that "Satan will then plunge the inhabitants of the earth into one great, final trouble."²⁵

Ellen White's Cultural Context

It would also be interesting to explore the relation between Ellen White's concept of the great controversy and the social and religious environment in which she lived and thought. Without suggesting derivation, we note certain similarities between her concerns and those of others in her time.

In nineteenth-century America the image of a vivid, well-populated spiritual realm played a prominent role in a number of emerging religious movements. For Spiritualists, the dead survive as spirits who sometimes contact the living. For Mormons, humans exist as spirit beings before their life on earth and will continue their journey after death in other parts of the universe. For Christian Scientists, humans



are essentially spirit beings; physical existence is an illusion. Like many around her, then, Ellen White believed that spirits populate the universe.

A similar inquiry involves the contours of Ellen White's Satanology, or diabolology. There are some striking similarities between her view of the Devil and the portrait of Satan in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. In each case, the Devil is a magnificent being who, though fallen, retains a great deal of his original majesty and intelligence, and who is engaged in a long struggle to defame God's character and under-

in spite of its negligible philosophical influence, the idea deserves consideration.

Some examples of suffering are of such duration, intensity, or magnitude that they require a cause of superhuman, indeed, near-cosmic proportions to be remotely comprehensible. The Holocaust has made the idea of the Devil plausible for many in the twentieth century. For recent examples, we have only to think of the thousands who perished on September 11, ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia, the massacre of millions in Rwanda and other African countries, and

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mine God's authority. Just where her perspective fits in the long history of diabolical images is an inquiry for another occasion.²⁶

The Great Controversy as a Theodicy

From a philosophical perspective, the crucial questions for any proposal concern its plausibility and coherence. What happens when we apply these criteria to Ellen White's luciferous theodicy?

Does the great controversy concept make sense today? Is the universe populated with intelligent beings? Are we surrounded by invisible personalities? In the thinking of many people today the answer is Yes. Angels have grown in popularity in recent years. They have been featured in national news magazines, major motion pictures, and network television series.

Millions of people also believe in the Devil. He is a familiar character in movies and novels. He figures prominently in a wide range of religious phenomena, evoking varied responses, from fear, revulsion, and defiance to admiration and even worship. He has even made an appearance in popular psychology.²⁷

In contrast, most philosophical treatments of evil today do without the Devil. In his extensive writings on theodicy John Hick makes no use of the idea of a prehuman angelic fall or the notion that the world is in the grip of demonic powers.²⁸ Similarly, in her writings on "horrendous evils," which she calls "the deepest of religious problems," Marilyn McCord Adams does not consider the figure of the Devil.²⁹ Yet

the continuing bloodshed in the Middle East.

Coming closer to home, we can all recall instances of cruelty and violence to those we know and care about that cry out for some sort of cosmic condemnation. Certain instances of suffering are such that we cannot begin to account for them in any proximate context of meaning. Their inspiration must come from something other than human. The Devil provides a way of coming to terms with such phenomena. Indeed, given the current state of human affairs, a luciferous theodicy may be sorely needed.

A philosophical position must be coherent as well as plausible, and this is where two important questions about Ellen White's theodicy arise. The first concerns the Devil's relation to God. The idea of a being whose revolt against God engulfs the entire universe and seriously threatens God's government conflicts with traditional views of divine sovereignty.

In fact, it almost looks like a version of dualism. For orthodox Christianity, everything owes its existence to God, who alone is all-powerful and self-existent. God brought all creatures into being, and God's power sustains them moment by moment.³⁰ Ellen White accepts this concept. "All created beings live by the will and power of God," she asserts. "They are dependent recipients of the life of God."³¹

But if everything owes its existence to God, why does the Devil enjoy such enormous power in the great controversy scheme? How could any created being

become a credible rival to God? What would intelligent beings hope to gain from contesting God's supremacy if they knew that God could instantly annihilate them?

There may be an answer to this in the central issue of the great controversy, which concerns perception rather than power. The central question is not whether God will reign, but whether God deserves to reign. To be precise, it is whether the creatures perceive that God deserves to reign. This blunts the force of the dualistic objection, but it does so by placing immense emphasis on the notion of the onlooking universe—the populace of moral beings that needs to be convinced that God fully deserves to be God. And this raises some questions of its own.

One is the very possibility of distrusting God. In the great controversy scenario the Devil accuses God of tyrannical behavior. God provides evidence of his true motives over the long course of human history. God's creatures weigh the evidence and conclude that God is who he claims to be—a benevolent, loving parent who really cares for his children. With this conclusion the Devil loses his argument and the conflict is over—case closed.

But what should we make of the notion of “God on trial”? The idea of God's creatures evaluating Satan's charges in light of the evidence and concluding that God is truly benevolent after all is a difficult one. For one thing, it clearly presupposes some independent standard of goodness by which God is judged, and people will question this for a number of familiar reasons.³²

The notion that God's creatures can investigate and come to a conclusion about God's character is also problematic given God's ontological status. To conduct a reliable investigation, we must be confident that the evidence before us has not been tampered with. We must also be confident that we have the capacity to weigh the evidence impartially and reach our own conclusions. In other words, we must have confidence in the structure of reality and in our own cognitive processes.

The fact that God is creator, however, means that God is involved in every aspect of reality. There is evidence to examine only because divine power sustains it. Our minds work the way they do because God has designed them that way. As a result, every claim to know something implicitly expresses confidence in God. It rests on the presupposition that God is trustworthy. Yet this is precisely what is at stake in the great controversy. It seems, then, that we cannot determine if God is trustworthy unless we assume that God is trustworthy. We find ourselves begging the question.

Even if we grant the possibility of impartially investigating God's trustworthiness, we have to wonder just why it takes the onlooking universe so long to see that sin is self-destructive and that God deserves to be God. If, indeed, God is love and the sufferings of this world are the consequences of abandoning God, it is hard to understand why it should take superior minds thousands of years to reach this conclusion. After all, humans are supposed to make their decisions for eternity in far less time and with less intelligence.

A further question about the coherence of this luciferous theodicy concerns its concept of a morally secure universe. As Ellen White describes it, the great controversy begins in Lucifer's unwarranted self-exaltation and ends when the inhabitants of the universe are completely loyal to God. So much evidence accumulates to support the love of God and expose the absurdity of sin that no reflective creature will ever again entertain the idea of rebelling against God.

But this account seems to shift the premise of rebellion from perversity to ignorance. Sin was absurd to begin. It originated with the one person in the universe who had the least reason to rebel, one who knew God better than all other creatures. His sin was an act of sheer perversity. It defied all the evidence.

As Ellen White describes the end of the conflict, however, sin seems to be a matter of ignorance. No one will ever sin again because the accumulated evidence to support God's claims is too great. Now, if Lucifer could rebel against God with all that he knew of God's character, how can we be sure that in future ages no other being will do the same? On the other hand, if enough evidence could prevent someone from sinning, why was it Lucifer, of all creatures, who started it?

We seem, then, to face a dilemma. If sin is a matter of ignorance, we have a basis for confidence in the ultimate security of the universe, but we cannot explain Lucifer's heavenly revolt. On the other hand, if sin is essentially an act of perversity, then we can identify Lucifer's rebellion, but we have no guarantee that some other being will not make an irrational, wholly unjustified, decision to rebel against God in the future.

These questions may be nothing more than philosophical quibbles, and one could respond to them by insisting that the great controversy should be viewed



as a sweeping religious symbol whose narrative power functions on levels of experience that philosophy is ill equipped to handle. At the same time, important ideas always invite careful reflection, and the concept of the great controversy is one of the most important ideas we have. I hope that these comments support the conviction that it merits serious discussion.

The great controversy is a rich and provocative theme. It plays a central role in traditional Adventist thought, and it speaks to popular consciousness today for various reasons. Ever since 9/11 people as prominent as the president of the United States have described international terrorists as “evil.” The recent holiday season brought the final cinematic installment of J. R. R. Tolkien’s epic fantasy, *Lord of the Rings*. So the struggle between good and evil is very much on people’s minds, both as a specter that haunts us and a spectacle that entertains us.

Consequently, this may be an ideal time for Adventists to say something to the larger world on the topic. We have a lively sense of the threat that evil represents. Evil is real and evil is powerful. But we also believe that evil is temporary, and this is the most important thing we have to say: When God’s kingdom comes, the great controversy will be over and evil will come to an end.

Notes and References

1. Ellen White, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1950), xii. The great controversy “vision” of 1858 provided the basis for a series of volumes entitled, *Spiritual Gifts*. It was later enlarged to form a second four-volume series, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, and ultimately expanded into the five-volume *Conflict of the Ages Series*, which Adventists widely regard as Ellen White’s magnum opus and the definitive expression of Adventist thought. *The Great Controversy* is the title of the fifth and most influential book in this series.

2. I am using the word *theodicy* rather broadly here, in contrast to other uses of the term, such as the one involved in Alvin Plantinga’s careful distinction between “theodicy” and “defense” in *God, Freedom and Evil* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 28. According to Plantinga, a theodicy seeks to establish that a particular response to evil is true; a defense, only that it is possible (*ibid.*, 58).

3. In spite of its overarching importance in Ellen White’s thought, Adventists have not given the concept of the great controversy a great deal of scrutiny. In a rare book-length study of this theme in Ellen White, Joe Battistone identifies it as her central

theological idea, the comprehensive framework in which she deals with all her important concerns (*The Great Controversy Theme in E. G. White’s Writings* [Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1978]). However, Battistone’s study is by and large a summary of her narrative from the origin of evil to the restoration of the earth. It does not offer a critical assessment of the concept. This article is a modest step toward that goal.

4. Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, 58; and Stephen T. Davis, “Free Will and Evil,” in *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy*, ed. Stephen T. Davis (Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox, 1981), 74–75.

5. Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1997); *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity, 2001).

6. “God might have created man without the power to transgress His law ... but in that case man would have been, not a free moral agent, but a mere automaton. Without freedom of choice, his obedience would not have been voluntary, but forced.” Ellen White, *The Story of Patriarchs and Prophets as Illustrated in the Lives of Holy Men of Old* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1958), 49.

7. Ellen White, *Desire of Ages* (Oakland, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1898), 758–61.

8. *Ibid.*, 758–61.

9. *Ibid.*, 763.

10. *Ibid.*, 764.

11. *Ibid.*, 763–64.

12. In fact, Ellen White also provides an emphatically luciferous theology. The Devil plays a major role in all the central doctrines of Christian faith, including creation, salvation, and last things. Her approach belies Jeffrey Burton Russell’s statement that “belief in the Devil’s existence is not part of the core of Christianity.” Russell, *Mephistopheles: The Devil in the Modern World* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press), 299.

13. John Hick’s book, *Evil and the God of Love*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), is one of the most influential discussions of the evil to appear in this century. It outlines two responses to the problem: Augustinian theodicy, which is essentially the free-will defense in its various forms, and Irenaean theodicy, the perspective Hick favors, which emphasizes the contribution that suffering makes to character development, or “soul-making.”

14. White, *Great Controversy*, 492–93.

15. *Ibid.*, 493.

16. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 48.

17. White, *Desire of Ages*, 761–62.

18. “Without freedom of choice, ... [t]here could have been no development of character.” White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 49.

19. *Ibid.*, 60, 61.

20. *Ibid.*, 68.

21. White, *Great Controversy*, 504.

22. This seems to be Alvin Plantinga's view. "A world containing creatures who are significantly free (and freely perform more good than evil actions) is more valuable, all else being equal, than a world containing no free creatures at all." *God, Freedom and Evil*, 30.

23. "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" Rev. 6:10.

24. I am indebted to Ernest Burse for prompting me to raise this question.

25. White, *Great Controversy*, 626.

26. Jeffrey Burton Russell's four-volume history of the concept of the Devil is probably the most complete study in recent years. The following books are available from Cornell University Press: *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil From Antiquity to Primitive Christianity* (1987); *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition* (1989); *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages* (1989); *Mephistopheles: The Devil in the Modern World* (1990). Another noteworthy contribution to literature on the Devil is Elaine Pagels, *The Origin of Satan* (New York: Random House, 1995).

The relation between the love of God and the ultimate fate of the wicked was an issue that attracted considerable attention in New England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A number found the idea of hell so repulsive that they rejected the notion of divine judgment in its entirety. In the ultimate scheme of things, they believed, there will be no permanent holdouts among God's enemies. Everyone will eventually acquiesce to God's sovereignty. For Ellen White, of course, the end of the wicked is part of the eschatological future. But it will not happen until everyone, good and evil alike—the Devil himself included—acknowledges God's ultimate right to universal sovereignty. White, *Great Controversy*, 670–71. This is hardly universalism of the classic sort, but it shows that God's love ultimately overcomes all opposition.

27. See M. Scott Peck, *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983).

28. Hicks, *Evil and the God of Love*, 333.

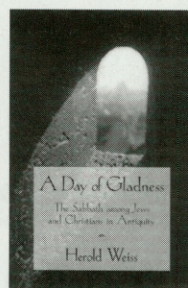
29. Marilyn McCord Adams, "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God," in *The Problem of Evil: Oxford Readings in Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 211. The Devil is also absent from her more recent book by the same name, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999). The index contains no references to "Devil," "Lucifer," or "Satan."

30. Paul's quotation of a pagan poet is often cited in this connection: "In him we live and move and have our being." Acts 17:28.

31. White, *Desire of Ages*, 785.

32. Is something good because God says it is, or does God say it is good because it is? If God is goodness itself, the idea of evaluating God's behavior against some other standard of goodness makes no sense.

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