

Adventists Finding Identity in God | BY RICHARD RICE

Coming to Terms with God



The doctrine of God has never been a defining aspect of Seventh-day Adventism. Unlike certain religious groups, we are not known for our distinctive perspective on the divine reality. In fact, in the century and two-thirds that Seventh-day Adventists have existed, the topic of God has seldom been the central focus of our theological concern. For the most part, the descriptions of God that appear in our doctrinal books do not break new ground, but merely restate standard theological formulas. For example, in a two-column article on "God," the *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* offers nothing more than brief comments on the statements that God is spirit, love, self-existent, immutable, omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, faithful, and holy.¹

This is not to say that God is relatively unimportant to Adventists, only that we have not given the topic extensive formal attention. A community's understanding of God involves much more than formal doctrinal statements; it involves concrete religious intuitions as well. To appreciate the connection between Adventist identity and God, we need to appreciate the importance of both elements. We must be sensitive to doctrines and to experience. In a sense, therefore, we must be both modern and postmodern.

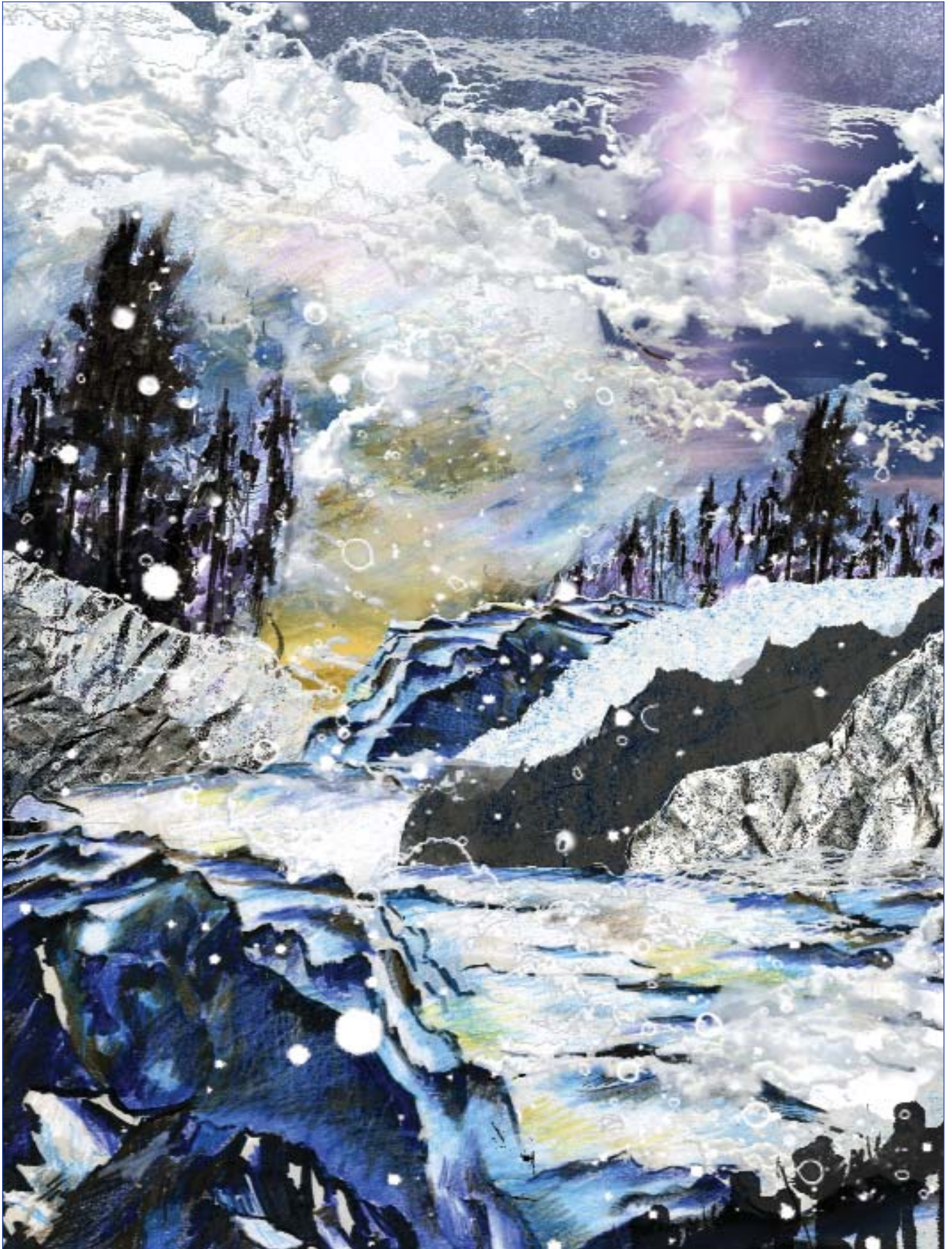
Philosopher Richard Rorty says, "It is pictures rather than propositions, metaphors rather than statements, which determine most of our philosophical convictions."² The same is true in

religion. Here, too, our most fundamental convictions are framed in symbols rather than in clear-cut concepts and propositions. Story, picture, and metaphor—things that speak directly to our imaginations—have a greater influence on the way we apprehend God than homiletical discourse or theological essay.

My own understanding of God certainly reflects this fact. Looking back to the earliest stages of my own spiritual odyssey—which has never taken me outside the Seventh-day Adventist community—I have become aware of the profound influence of stories, pictures, art, and music on my religious development. The very first book I remember was volume 1 of *The Children's Hour* by Arthur S. Maxwell. Paging through that book years later, along with the four that followed it, I recalled the stories that so engrossed me as a child—stories that guided my life, fostered my values, molded my attitudes, and, most importantly, shaped my view of God. As many of you know, children are the central characters in many of Uncle Arthur's stories. His favorite plots seem to involve three things: the serious consequences of disobedience or bad judgment; the rewards of obedience (which weren't nearly as exciting); and miraculous deliverances from peril, often in direct answer to prayer.

It is interesting to reflect on the view of God that such plots communicate to young minds. God is firmly in control of the world and takes a keen interest in boys and girls, particularly in their behavior. God rewards those who are obedient to the divine will—or

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artwork by heather langley

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to their parents or teachers, who act in God's stead. And those who disobey meet with dire consequences. God answers prayer in remarkable ways, protecting us from harm or meeting a desperate need just in the nick of time. We may not think of moralistic anecdotes as primary sources of doctrine, but the widespread exposure to such stories by several generations of Adventists has had a significant influence on our collective view of God. My guess is that Uncle Arthur has contributed more to the way Adventists feel about God than all the books our theologians have written.

As we explore the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of God here, we will focus on doctrinal formulas. But we should bear in mind that they are only part of the picture. Experience and doctrines have reciprocal effects in the life of a religious community. On the one hand, we give our collective apprehension of God conceptual formulation in response to emerging challenges to communicate and defend our faith. On the other hand, our concepts of God also shape our apprehensions and expectations of God. So, our experience of God gives rise to doctrines about God, and our doctrines, in turn, affect the way we experience God.

Central Features in the Seventh-day Adventist Understanding of God

The Johanne exclamation, "God is love," comes as close as any biblical statement to a definition of God. And the same affirmation plays a prominent role in Ellen White's writings. In fact, the theme permeates her writings. *The Conflict of the Ages* book series begins and ends with the words: "God is love." *Steps to Christ*, her devotional classic, opens with the assertion, "Nature and revelation alike testify of God's love."³ And her descriptions of this central divine attribute are often filled with superlatives. One of the most inspiring appears in *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 5:

All the paternal love which has come down from generation to generation through the channel of human hearts, all the springs of tenderness which have opened in the souls of men, are but as a tiny rill to the boundless ocean when compared with the infinite, exhaustless love of God. Tongue cannot utter it; pen cannot portray it. You may meditate upon it every day of your life; you may search the Scriptures diligently in order to understand it; you may summon every power and capability that God has given you, in the endeavor to comprehend the love and compassion of the heavenly father; and yet there is an infinity beyond. You may study that love for ages; yet you can never fully comprehend the length and the breadth, the depth and the height, of the love of God in giving His Son to die for the world. Eternity itself can never fully reveal it.⁴

In recent years a number of Seventh-day Adventist writers have underscored the importance of love for an understanding of God. Alden Thompsen appeals to the freedom-loving nature of God to establish a continuity between the God of the Gospel and the God of the Old Testament.⁵ In the opening essay of a symposium volume expounding Arminian theology, Fritz Guy observes that love is the one word that Christians apply to God without qualification. Accordingly, he maintains, love is more basic to God's character than qualities such as power and justice. It leads God to take enormous risks and provide extravagant displays of affection. It also makes God dynamically responsive to creatures and vulnerable to disappointment.⁶

No contemporary Seventh-day Adventist thinker has concentrated more exclusively on God's love than the late A. Graham Maxwell. His book *Servants or Friends? Another Look at God*⁷ reiterates the themes that his large following appreciated for many years. Taking as his key text Jesus' statement to his disciples, "I do not call you servants any longer, but friends," Maxwell argues that the notion of friendship is central to an adequate understanding of God.⁸ God invites us into intimate, personal friend-

ship with him. In contrast to the servant obedience of those who erroneously think of God as an exacting master, the response of those who understand the truth about God is love and trust. Based on their friendship with God, they are able to tell others the truth about God.

Although the doctrine of God as such is not a typical Adventist preoccupation, from time to time it has received specific attention. Significantly, each of these developments connects in interesting ways to the fundamental quality of divine love. Let us consider the following points:

1. Only a personal being can love.
2. God's love has to overcome opposition.
3. It is God's very nature to love.

God as Person

The question of God's person-ness became a contested issue among Adventists twice during Ellen White's ministry—during the 1850s and around the turn of the century. On both occasions she staunchly defended the notion that God is a distinct personal being.

The "spiritualizers" of the 1840s and 1850s responded to the Great Disappointment by asserting that Christ had in fact returned as the Advent Movement had predicted. But they construed the Second Coming as a spiritual event, not a physical, visible return to earth. In a somewhat similar way, they also spiritualized the nature of God, viewing divinity as a pervasive influence in the world, rather than a specific, self-conscious being. In reaction, important Adventists such as James White and Uriah Smith defended God's personal nature by asserting that Christ is both clearly distinct from and subordinate to the Father.⁹

Ellen White appealed to the fact that she had seen the Father and the Son in vision as distinct physical realities. "I have often seen the lovely Jesus, that He is a *person*," she wrote in 1851. "I asked Him if His Father was a person and had a form like Himself. Said Jesus, 'I am in the express *image* of my Father's *person*.'"¹⁰ Although the Father and the Son apparently have identical physical forms, only

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that of the Son is visible, even in vision. Several years later, Ellen White said that God was presented to her in vision as a physical presence, but not one that human eyes could directly behold. "The Father was enshrouded with a body of light and glory, so that His person could not be seen; yet I knew that it was the Father and that from His person emanated this light and glory. When I saw this body of light and glory rise from the throne, I knew it was because the Father moved."¹¹ God must be a person, and therefore cannot be mere spirit, she seems to argue, because God has a concrete physical form.

Although Ellen White's early statements connect divine person-ness with the possession of a physical form, her later statements are strikingly different. She returned to the question of God's person-ness some fifty years later, and this time she defended the concept on entirely different grounds.

Ellen White produced her most sustained discussion of the nature of God in response to what is often called the "pantheism" crisis. It was published as section 5 of *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 8. In this passage, she repeatedly affirms the personal nature of God, but not once does she invoke the notion that God has a physical form to defend this point. She rejects "the theory that God is an essence pervading all nature" more because the idea is inadequate than inaccurate.¹² "God is the mighty power that works through all nature and sustains all things," she asserts, but this power is "not merely an all-pervading principle, an actuating energy. God is a spirit; yet He is a personal being, for man was made in his image."¹³ Mentioning the image of God could lead to the idea that there is a physical correspondence between human beings and God, but this is not the avenue Ellen White takes. We must understand God as personal in nature, she argues, that is, as a distinct conscious being, because we see intelligent agency at work in human origins, in the ongoing course of nature, and most significantly, in the life and ministry of Jesus.



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God in Conflict

The love of God also provides the backdrop for the concept of a cosmic conflict, which figures prominently in Adventist theology.¹⁴ Ellen White's Great Controversy vision of 1858 provided the basis for a series of volumes titled *Spiritual Gifts*. This 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 the most influential expression of Adventist thought.^{15 16 17}

As depicted by Ellen White, the entire moral universe is engulfed in a contest between God and his archrival, Lucifer, which began with Lucifer's rebellion in heaven and will ultimately end with the final destruction of the wicked and the establishment of God's eternal kingdom on earth. The mighty fallen angel was the power that tempted the first humans in the Garden of Eden. Speaking through the serpent in the Garden of Eden, he persuaded Eve to eat from the forbidden tree and gained control over humankind when Adam followed suit. Variouslly identified as the devil, Satan, and the enemy of souls, this great antagonist has been active throughout human history to foment sin and strife. He is the ultimate cause of all the misery on this planet. So, the course of human history represents one long, sustained warfare between God and the devil, as God pursues divine objectives in creation, populating this planet with loyal beings happy in God's service, while the devil strives to undermine all that God seeks to accomplish.

There would be no rebellion, of course, unless God's creatures were free to rebel, and God endows them with freedom because he loves them and desires them to love him in return. Because God is a God of love, he "takes no pleasure in a forced allegiance," but "desires from all His creatures the service of love—homage that springs from an intelligent appreciation of His character." This is why God grants to his creatures freedom of will. He desires that they

"render Him voluntary service."¹⁸

The decisive battles in this protracted conflict occurred during the ministry of Jesus. Satan worked on two fronts to defeat Christ's mission. He tried to persuade Jesus to distrust and rebel against God, and he stirred up opposition to Jesus' ministry. In the face of powerful temptations, Jesus remained loyal to the Father, and faithfully followed the path of suffering servanthood to the cross. The Son's condescension to the level of humanity and submission to a humiliating death on the cross played a key role in resolving the Great Controversy. By demonstrating beyond all doubt that God is generous, caring, and self-denying, they provided a decisive refutation of the devil's charges against God.

Christ's work demonstrates that the devil's charge that God is tyrannical, overbearing, and unfair is utterly without foundation and completely inexcusable. "It is impossible to explain the origin of sin so as to give a reason for its existence... Sin is an intruder, for whose presence no reason can be given. It is mysterious, unaccountable... the outworking of a principle at war with the great law of love which is the foundation of the divine government." And "In the final execution of the judgment it will be seen that no cause for sin exists."¹⁹

There was only one way for God to respond to this problem: it was necessary to provide a manifestation of divine love so powerful that no rational creature could possibly deny it. This is precisely what the cross represents. It showed beyond all doubt that God is unrelentingly committed to the welfare of creatures—and is willing to suffer and sacrifice in order to win their confidence. This display of divine love laid to rest any doubt regarding God's benevolence. In so doing, it exposed Satan's charges for exactly what they were—pure fabrications spun from a mind filled with self-promotion.

The idea of the Great Controversy has important implications for God's relation to the world. It points to a genuine interaction

between God and creatures. God does not achieve divine purposes simply by willing them to be so. This is most obvious in connection with human salvation. Adventists have traditionally believed that God offers salvation to all, but that not all receive it. While faith does not contribute to the gift, the gift has no effect unless we accept it. It also implies that God takes risks and makes sacrifices. The fact that he endows his creatures with freedom to accept his love means that they are free to reject it.

The most important implications of the Great Controversy thus concern the fundamental nature of God. It places love clearly at the center of the divine reality. Love is not merely an attribute of God—not even the most important of divine attributes. Rather, it describes the very essence of the divine being. Love is not something God happens to do, but is something that expresses God’s inner reality. It is God’s very nature to love. To express this conviction Christians centuries ago developed the doctrine of the Trinity.

God as Trinity

Whereas Seventh-day Adventists developed their concept of God’s person-ness in a succession of rather distinct episodes, the view of God as Trinity emerged within Adventism through a process of gradual evolution. Even though it never crystallized as an “issue” that stimulated extensive discussion or precipitated official action, we find striking differences between the views of early Adventists and the church’s more recent thinking. As George R. Knight observes, so removed is the church’s position now from what it was at the beginning that “[m]ost of the founders of Seventh-day Adventism would not be able to join the church today if they had to subscribe to the denomination’s Fundamental Beliefs.”²⁰ Important early Adventists directly opposed the idea of the Trinity. For Joseph Bates it was unscriptural, for James White it was an “absurdity,” and for M. E. Cornell it was a fruit of the great

apostasy that also included Sunday keeping and the immortality of the soul.^{21 22} In fact, C. Mervyn Maxwell concludes that early Adventists were “about as uniform in opposing Trinitarianism as they were in advocating belief in the Second Coming.”²³

In contrast, Seventh-day Adventist thinkers today are as uniformly supportive of the idea. They use explicitly Trinitarian language to talk about God and they interpret the concept of Trinity with care and subtlety. For example, in an *Adventist Review* article entitled “The Mystery of the Trinity: God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,” Raoul Dederen, professor emeritus of theology at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, defends the doctrine of the Trinity as biblically based, even though, as he notes, the word itself is not found in Scripture. He also rejects all tritheistic or modalistic conceptions of God and urges us to respect the essential mystery of God’s triune reality.²⁴ Gerard Damsteeg’s widely circulated commentary on the 1980 Statement of Fundamental Beliefs is equally explicit in affirming the Trinity and it, too, explores the meaning of the idea, albeit briefly. The Godhead comprises a relationship of love that comes to expression in the work of salvation, and most clearly at the cross of Christ. The Trinitarian differentiations within God correspond to the various saving activities of God.²⁵ In his substantial contribution to the *Handbook of Adventist Theology*—an essay of fifty-five pages on the doctrine of God—Fernando Canale devotes eighteen pages to the topic of the Trinity.²⁶

When and how did this transformation take place? I’m not sure we can tell. The earliest version of the Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists (1932) describes “the Godhead, or Trinity,” as consisting of “the Eternal Father,” “the Lord Jesus Christ,” and “the Holy Spirit.” The 1980 revision of the Statement clearly affirms and further develops the idea. Belief 2 asserts, “There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit a unity of three co-eternal Per-

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sons,” and Beliefs 3, 4, and 5 deal respectively with “God the Eternal Father,” “God the Eternal Son,” and “God the Eternal Spirit.”

One of the Adventist Church’s most significant liturgical sources also points to a doctrinal transition in recent years. Looking at the *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* of 1985 alongside the 1949 *Church Hymnal* it replaced, we surmise that there were reservations among Adventists about the concept of the Trinity in the late 1940s but that these reservations were largely overcome within the next three decades. The 1949 publication altered a number of familiar Christian hymns in order to remove their Trinitarian references. The 1985 publication restored the Trinitarian references to these hymns. Thus, the closing line of “Holy, Holy, Holy” in the 1949 hymnal—“God over all who rules eternity”—becomes in the 1985 hymnal “God in three persons, blessed Trinity!” The 1949 version of “Come Thou, Almighty King” deletes a stanza that begins with the words “To Thee, great One in Three, Eternal praises be.” The 1985 version restores that stanza. The 1985 publication also adds no fewer than ten new hymns containing straightforward Trinitarian language. Consequently, we can now sing the following lines: “Praise the Father, praise the Son, and praise the Spirit, three in One” (in hymn 2); “Holy Father, Holy Son, Holy Spirit, three we name You” (in hymn 30); “The Trinity whom we adore, forever and forever more” (in hymn 148).

If a community’s worship provides an important indication of its religious understanding, it is clear that significant developments have taken place in the past few decades in the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of God. It has brought our understanding of God into harmony with the profound insights of some of the earliest Christian thinkers, who recognized this affirmation of God’s complex unity as the only adequate way to safeguard the central claim of Christian faith, “God was in Christ.” And it places us squarely within the circumference of orthodox Christianity.

The texts most frequently cited to support the

idea of Trinity are Matthew 28:19–20 (the baptismal formula) and 2 Corinthians 13:14 (the apostolic benediction). But the close connections among God the Father, the Son and the Spirit are evident in other passages, too. According to both Paul and John, the sending of the Spirit parallels the sending of the Son. And in John, sending the Spirit is attributed to both the Father and the Son.

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God. (Gal 4:4-7)

But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. (John 14:26) Cf.

When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. (John 15:26)

The designations of those who send, “God,” “the Father,” and “Christ,” and of the ones who are sent, the “Son” and “the Spirit,” indicate that all of God—Father, Son and Spirit—is involved in salvation history.

The close association of Father, Son and Spirit in the plan of salvation tells us something important about God’s own life. Early Christians arrived at this insight as they worked out their understanding of Christ’s divinity. Behind the question, “Is Jesus Christ divine?” lay a more basic question: Is salvation God’s own work, or did God send a subordinate to carry it out? In upholding Christ’s full divinity, the early church affirmed that salvation is God’s very own work, not that of a lesser being.²⁷ In other words, God loves us so much that God himself entered human history in the person of the Son in order to effect our reconciliation.

If this is true, then there must be an intimate connection between God’s saving activity and God’s inner life. As Jesus declared to

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the disciples, "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:8–9). In other words, God revealed himself in Jesus as he really is. The plan of salvation manifests something that has always been true of God. Love is the central characteristic of God's own being. God has always existed as Father, Son and Spirit, as an everlasting community of love.^{28 29 30}

If the events of salvation history have their counterpart in God's own life, then the Christian community owes its identity, as well as its origin, to its unique relation to the triune God. God's activity as Father, Son and Spirit not only brings the church into existence, the love that characterizes God's eternal existence imparts to the church its essential character.

The close connection between the Christian community and the life of God becomes apparent in the "farewell discourses" of the fourth Gospel and in 1 John. In these passages we find the following ideas circling around the theme of divine love, joining together in more and more complex relations: the love that church members have for each other; their love for God and God's love for them; and the love that unites God himself, namely, the love between the Father and the Son.

First of all, the distinctive quality of life within the Christian community is that of love: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). Love is the essential feature that sets Jesus' followers apart from other human groups. Consequently, those who think they are part of the community and don't love each other are deceiving themselves. "[A]ll who do not do what is right are not from God, nor are those who do not love their brothers and sisters" (1 John 3:10). On the positive side, "We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another" (1 John 3:14).

Second, it is not love per se, or just any sort of affection that identifies Jesus' followers. It is the specific love that Jesus has for them that sets the standard for their love to one another.

"Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another" (John 13:34). "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:12–13). Jesus' followers should be prepared to love one another to the end, just as he "loved them to the end" (Cf. John 13.1).

Third, Jesus' love for the disciples expresses the Father's own love for them. "[F]or the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God" (John 16:27). The Father's love flows through the Son into the Christian community.

Indeed, Jesus' statements about his relation to the Father and his relation to his followers indicate that Jesus wants his followers to enjoy the same relation to God that he enjoys. Just as the Father comes to the disciples in the person of Jesus, Jesus brings the disciples to the Father. "Those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them" (John 14:21). "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them" (John 14:23).

The idea that Jesus' followers enjoy a relation to God very similar to his own appears in a number of passages. "When we cry, 'Abba! Father!'" wrote Paul, "it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ" (Rom 8:15–17).

Fourth, the love that Jesus has for his followers reflects the love that he and the Father have for each other. For his followers present and future, Jesus prayed, "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us... The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (John

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17:20–23). The author of 1 John brings together fellowship with one another and fellowship with God this way: “That you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3). The divine love that creates Christian community thus manifests and extends the love that constitutes God’s own life.

This line of thought leads to a dramatic conclusion. The central dynamic of the Christian community not only resembles the essential dynamic of God’s own life; its members actually share in that life. Through the Spirit, those who are “in Christ” come to share the eternal relationship that the Son enjoys with the Father. The love that radiates between Father and Son flows into the church. And because participants in this new community are co-heirs with Christ, the Father bestows on them what he eternally lavishes on the Son. In summary, the church owes its existence to God’s saving activity and derives its essential character from God’s own identity.³¹

This understanding of the church puts a new slant on one of Ellen White’s best known statements about the condition of God’s people and the end of time. “Christ himself is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in his people, then He will come to claim them as His own.”³² If love is the central dynamic of God’s own life, and it was Christ’s mission to reveal this love, then the essential purpose of the church is to find its identity in the quality that is essential to God’s own life. Its mission is to demonstrate by the love its members display toward one another the love that characterizes God’s own reality.

Toward a Seventh-day Adventist View of God

With these things in mind, we can identify several tasks that Adventist thinking about God should address in the future.

First of all, we need to give the doctrine of God explicit theological attention. It has developed among us

more or less spontaneously over the years. In some ways that is good, because it has prevented us from formally committing ourselves to erroneous views. But the time has come to give the doctrine of God the attention it deserves. We cannot let our understanding of the central theme of Christian faith grow like topsy. This means that we should elevate our doctrine of God to a position of paramount theological importance. As many Christian theologians now acknowledge, God is the central and all-encompassing article of Christian faith. Everything else the church has to say is commentary on this one, fundamental doctrine.

Second, as we develop our doctrine of God, we need to draw on all the resources that bear on our understanding. This means attending to neglected Biblical themes, particularly those dealing with the inner life of God. We give far too little attention to such phenomena as divine repentance and divine sensitivity, in spite of the fact that they are central to the Biblical portrait of God. We also need to attend to the insights of our own religious experiences. Our personal apprehensions of God sometimes provide a helpful corrective to traditional theoretical formulations.

Third, we need to determine what is central and what is peripheral to our understanding of God. If love is really the most important divine attribute, then everything Adventists have to say is a commentary on divine love. We need to demonstrate how the definition of God as love informs our understanding of God, and we need to explore the consequences of this transformation for everything else we believe. This will lead us to expand our understanding of God as Trinity. To do this, we should draw on some of the powerful resources of Christian tradition, as they explore what it means to proclaim that God is love. The concept of the Trinity is not a Hellenistic corruption of the Gospel nor a philosophical departure from primitive Christianity. Rather, it is a profound meditation on the meaning of God’s self-giving in the mission of Christ to redeem the fallen world.

Fourth, we need to develop a rationale for believing in

God that addresses contemporary challenges to its credibility. There have seldom been more outspoken opponents of religion than in the last decade or so. The writings of the “new atheists”—as figures such as Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Samuel Harris and Christopher Hitchens are sometimes described—have made their way onto the best seller lists with forceful objections to the very idea of a divine being. If Seventh-day Adventism is to be a vibrant force in the developed countries of the world, it must address the serious doubts people have about God.

The first great commandment is a call to worship God. So, too, is the first angel’s message. A doctrine of God, therefore, is more than part of the Advent message; properly understood, it is the Advent message. Our central mission is to portray the love of God to the world. ■

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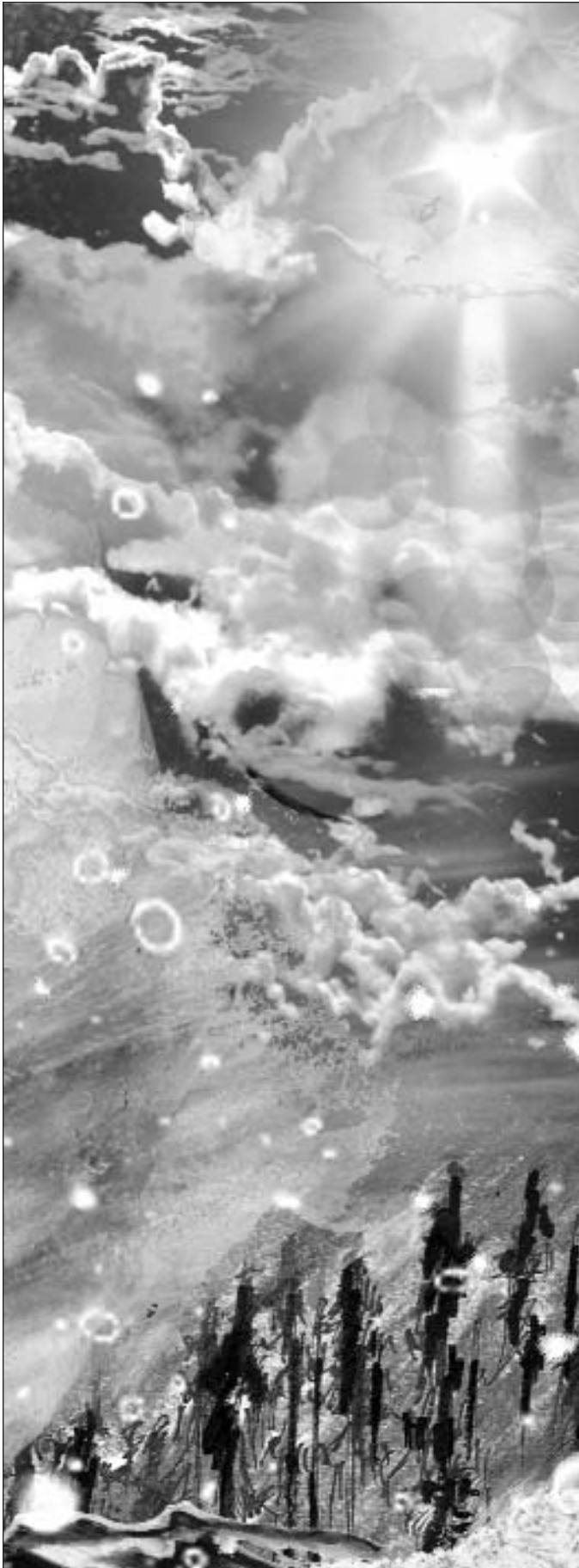
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"The Great Controversy and the Problem of Evil," *Spectrum: Journal of the Association of Adventist Forums*, 32, no. 1 (2004), 45–55.

15. In his book-length study of this concept in Ellen White's thought, Joe Battistone (1978) identifies it as her central theological idea, the comprehensive framework within which she deals with all her important concerns. In a much more recent study, Sigve Tonstad (2006) analyzes the descriptions of cosmic conflict that appear in the Book of Revelation.

16. Battistone, Joe, *The Great Controversy Theme in E. G. White's Writings* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1978).

17. Tonstad, Sigve, *Saving God's Reputation: The Theological Function of Pistis Iesou in the Cosmic Narratives of Revelation* (London, New York: T & T Clark, 2006).

18. White, Ellen G., *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911), 498.

19. *Ibid.*, 492–493, 503.

20. Knight, George R., "Adventists and Change," *Ministry*, 66, no. 10 (Oct., 1993): 11.

21. *Ibid.*, 10.

22. Knight also mentions two scholarly examinations of early Adventist anti-trinitarianism: Erwin R. Gane, "The Arian or Anti-Trinitarian Views Presented in Seventh-day Adventist Literature and the Ellen G. White Answer" (MA thesis, Andrews University 1963), and Russell Holt, "The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination: Its Rejection and Acceptance" (term paper, Andrews University 1969).

23. Maxwell, C. Mervyn, "Sanctuary and Atonement in Adventist Theology: An Historical Survey," *The Sanctuary and the Atonement: Biblical, Historical and Theological Studies*, eds. Arnold V. Wallenkampf and W. Richard Leshner (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1981), 56.

24. Dederen, Raoul, "The Mystery of the Trinity: God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit," *Adventist Review* (1993): 8–11.

25. Damsteegt, Gerard, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: A Biblical Exposition of Twenty-Seven Fundamental Doctrines* (Washington, DC: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1988), 17–25.

26. Canale, Fernando, "Doctrine of God," *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. George W. Reid, Raoul Dederen, et al (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), 105–159.

27. Rice, Richard, "Trinity, Temporality and Open Theism," *Philosophia: Philosophical Quarterly of Israel*, 35, nos. 3–4 (2007).

28. The conviction that God's revelation in Jesus Christ was a genuine self-revelation pervades recent discussions of the trinity. For Wolfhart Pannenberg, for example, God's actions in salvation history reveal that God's inner reality consists of "concrete life relations." (1998, p. 335). And for Jurgen Moltmann, "As God appears in history as the sending Father and the sent Son, so he must earlier have been in himself....The relations between the discernible and visible history of Jesus and the God whom he called 'my Father' correspond to the relation of the Son to the Father in eternity" (Moltmann 1977).

29. Pannenberg, Wolfhart, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 335.

30. Moltmann, Jurgen, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, trans. Margaret Kohl (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 57.

31. Rice, Richard, "The Trinitarian Basis of Christian Community," *Ministry: International Journal for Ministers* (February, 2009).

32. White, Ellen G., *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1941), 69.