



# MINISTRY<sup>®</sup>

INTERNATIONAL  
JOURNAL FOR PASTORS  
FEBRUARY 2009

# THE TRINITY

IN  
EVERY  
ISSUE

Letters  
3

Editorial  
4

Book Reviews  
27

Pastor's Pastor  
28

Dateline  
30

## 5 The Trinity in Seventh-day Adventist history

*Adventist doctrines have undergone stages of development since the inception of the church. The doctrine of the Trinity is no exception.*

Merlin D. Burt

## 9 A trinitarian view of the Cross

*The Cross represents one of the primary modes of revelation concerning the triune God.*

John C. Johnson

## 13 The trinitarian basis of Christian community

*A trinitarian understanding of God has important implications for the entire range of beliefs, but its connection to the doctrine of the church is particularly significant.*

Richard Rice

## 19 Reading about the Trinity: A list for additional research

*Resources for the Bible student who wishes to gain a better understanding about the Trinity.*

Rollin Shoemaker

## 23 Improving the nominating committee process: Broadening our vision of volunteer support in the church

*Filling volunteer positions of responsibility can be a challenging task. Here are some suggestions that can make that task more manageable.*

Curtis Rittenour

# MINISTRY®

*Ministry® is the international journal of the Seventh-day Adventist® Ministerial Association and has been published since 1928.*

**Association Secretary** James A. Cress

**Editor** Nikolaus Satelmajer

**Associate Editor** Willie E. Hucks II

**Consultant to Editor** Myrna Tetz

**Editorial Assistant** Sheryl Beck

**Database Assistant** John Feezer IV

**Student Assistant** Evan Knott

**Professional Growth** Anthony Kent

**Contributing Editors** Jonas Arrais, Sharon Cress, John M. Fowler, Clifford Goldstein, Anthony Kent, Peter Prime, Kit Watts

**International Editors**

Chinese Robert Wong

Indonesian Edwin T. Pandjaitan

Japanese Yukio Ebihara

Korean Sung Sun Hong

Portuguese (South America) Zinaldo Santos

Russian Ilie Leahu

Spanish (South America) Marcos Blanco

Spanish (Inter America) Fernando Zabala

**International Advisors** Ron Clouzet, Daniel Duda, R. Danforth Francis, Passmore Hachalinga, John Kakembo, Ilie Leahu, Miguel Luna, Bruno Raso, Hector Sanchez, Houtman Sinaga, Bruno Vertallier, Gary Webster, Measapogu Wilson

**Consulting Editors** Leslie Baumgarter, S. Peter Campbell, Ben Clausen, John C. Cress, Raoul Dederen, Ron Flowers, Jeanne Hartwell, Michael Hasel, Roland Hegstad, Mitchell Henson, Gerry Karst, Kathleen Kuntaraj, Ekkehardt Mueller, Norma Osborn, Jan Paulsen, Robert Peach, Leslie Pollard, Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, Fredrick Russell, Maylan Schurch, Loren Seibold, William Shea, Penny Shell, Dan Smith, Russell Staples, Richard Tibbits, Steve Willsey, Edward Zinke

**Advertising** Editorial Office

**Subscriptions/renewals/address changes** ministrysubscriptions@gc.adventist.org (email); 301-680-6508 (phone); 301-680-6502 (fax)

**Ministerial Resource Center** Cathy Payne  
888-771-0738, 301-680-6508

**Cover Illustration** 316 Creative

**Layout** 316 Creative

**Subscriptions** 12 issues: United States US\$32.50; Canada and overseas US\$45.50; single copy US\$3.00. To order: send name, address, and payment to Ministry® Subscriptions, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600 U.S.A.

**Web site** www.ministrymagazine.org

**To Writers** We welcome unsolicited manuscripts. Before submitting, review the writers' guidelines at www.ministrymagazine.org. Please send manuscripts via email with your name, address, and telephone number. Send editorial correspondence to ministrymagazine@gc.adventist.org.

**Ministry® (ISSN 0026-5314)** is a journal of the Ministerial Association, © 2009, published monthly by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists® and printed by Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1350 N. Kings Road, Nampa, ID 83687-3193. Member Associated Church Press. Standard mail postage paid at Nampa, Idaho.

Adventist®, Seventh-day Adventist®, and Ministry® are the registered trademarks of the General Conference Corporation of Seventh-day Adventists®.

PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

**Vol. 81 Number 2**

**Bible credits** Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved. Scriptures quoted from NKJV are from The New King James Version, copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982, Thomas Nelson, Inc., Publishers. Scripture texts quoted from NRSV are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked (ESV) are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

“IT GAVE A DIRECTION TO  
MY MINISTRY THAT MADE  
ME PRODUCTIVE, EFFICIENT,  
CONFIDENT, AND DEDICATED.”

### Communion and the issue of unworthiness

I appreciated Roberto Iannò's article ("The Communion Service and the Issue of Unworthiness," December 2008) and the positive focus given. I am grateful that Christ's worthiness is the message especially conveyed when participating in the Communion service.

I wonder, however, why there was no mention or discussion of 1 Corinthians 11:30—"For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep" [NKJV]. Checking several commentaries, I found consistent agreement that the phrase refers to God's chastisements for a casual participation that failed to distinguish between the common table and the Lord's table. If that is the case, it suggests God sometimes sends unmistakable wake-up calls, including sickness and death, for a problematic participation in the Communion service. The author is correct in pointing out that Judas participated in the first Communion service in spite of the nefarious ideas simmering in his heart. However, the service did him no enduring good.

We are quite right in allowing anyone to participate, but are we as right in not warning attendees that a casual participation not only has no

redemptive value, but could bring God's chastisements, according to Paul?

—Dan Augsburg, email

### Twelve questions for December

As I read Dr. Satelmajer's editorial ("Twelve Questions for December," December 2008), I recalled a somewhat similar article by a *Ministry* editor [from] about 1953 or so. It had the same helpful suggestions [on] how to be organized and self-disciplined. It gave me an impetus to study and apply such principles [as] organization and planning. It gave a direction to my ministry that made me productive, efficient, confident, and dedicated.

Your article is very timely and needed. If beginning ministers follow these principles, they will find their ministry more enjoyable and productive [in] service. In the nearly 20 years since I retired, I have seen both sides of the equation. There are those disciplined, organized workers who nobly serve. And there are also those who desperately need organization in their lives. It is my opinion that accountability is lacking. We never should have removed the report system that was required by the conference in my earlier years as a worker. No accountability can mean little or no productivity.

Keep advising the world ministry of the necessity of planning, organizing, actuating, debriefing, and evaluating.

—Duane Anderson, email

### Pastoral response to suffering

I quite enjoyed Aleksandar Santrac's article about a pastoral response to suffering ("Why Do You Permit This, Oh Lord? The Problem of Evil and Pastoral Practice," December 2008). He covered a difficult subject concisely, giving the most plausible theodicy to explain it: Alvin Plantinga's free will solution.

However, the most interesting aspect of Santrac's discussion was the insights Ellen White has on this problem with her statement about God's purpose. He has allowed Satan to develop his plan to maturity so that the whole universe may see the consequences of sin. This permission has resulted in an excess of evil, beyond what would seem reasonable. And through it all, Satan's character is revealed.

Shakespeare said, "[All] the world's a stage." Indeed our little world *is* a stage for the whole universe, and our experiences teach them about sin and about how God works to save us.

—Allen Shepherd, MD, Hobart, Indiana, United States

# Sound theology builds healthy churches

A church can appear to be successful without sound theology, but according to Scriptures, a *truly* healthy church must have a sound theology. The New Testament writings show us that the early church spent considerable time dealing with theological topics. The Gospel writers, Paul, and others realized the need to have a theology that would serve the church under all circumstances. History shows us that whenever the church did not have sound theology, daily life was compromised. The pioneers of the movement that developed into the Seventh-day Adventist Church studied, debated, and wrote about theological issues as if the life of the church depended on the outcome.

If a healthy church needs sound theology, how does the church develop this? It seems to me that some principles need to be followed with sound theology as the outcome. Let me suggest some ways of developing a sound theology:

## **Recognize the role of the local congregation**

The local congregation is essential in the development of sound theology. The church needs individuals who specialize in theological issues, but their work has to be understood, appreciated, and accepted by congregations. During the New Testament period, theology was conducted within the context of the congregations. Paul, for example, entered into a detailed theological discussion with the church in Galatia. "O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?" he asks them (Gal. 3:1, NKJV). Paul recognized that theological issues impact the local congregation.

With theology deemed important in the local congregation, then the pastor performs a vital theological role. The pastor has many responsibilities; one of them equates with preaching and teaching sound theology, for most members often believe the pastor to be the primary source of theology. Additionally, the pastor must deal with divergent theological positions held by

NIKOLAUS SATELMAJER



church members and recognize that some of these positions can be very harmful to the congregation.

## **The role of the Spirit**

If divergent theological views have always existed, and continue to exist in the church, how do we reach a consensus so that we can function as a healthy spiritual body? Jesus promised that " 'when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth' " (John 16:13, NIV). Listening to the Spirit does not always lead to speedy resolutions of theological issues, but we have the promise that the Spirit will guide us, just as the Spirit has guided those before us. This approach requires patience and trust, but if followed, the outcome will make the church stronger. This approach means that individuals who hold theological positions that are different from the church body must seriously ask themselves where the Spirit is leading them.

## **God assumes responsibility for His church**

No matter the approach used, sometimes it appears difficult, if not impossible, to reach a theological consensus. What then? Sometimes the alternatives are not appealing, but I am suggesting that we need to keep several points before us.

First of all, it's important to realize that the church is not always wrong. If you find yourself in opposition to a position of the church, it's not safe to conclude that you are right and everyone else wrong. On what basis can you conclude that you are right and all others wrong? We have seen that individuals

who have a high view of their positions can often bring much harm both to the church and themselves. But does not such a position stifle reform and change if change is needed? Not necessarily. Consider well-known Reformers such as Martin Luther, John and Charles Wesley, and William Miller. Their primary contribution to reform was not so much in pointing out the errors of the church; rather, they shared their spiritual renewal and the reform *they* were experiencing. That approach becomes much more effective than dwelling on the errors of others and the "rightness" of one's own position.

Secondly, the church belongs to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Paul reminds us that "he [Jesus Christ] is the head of the body, the church" (Col. 1:18, NIV). That's encouraging and should give us confidence that the Lord will not allow the church to fail. The church remains much safer in God's hands than in our hands.

This issue of *Ministry* has several articles about the Trinity and a list of resources on the topic. Why this focus? We know that in the history of our church this topic, at one time, was debated, but the church, under the guidance of the Spirit, reached a consensus based on sound biblical teachings. Some of our readers—conference leaders, theologians, and others—have shared with us their concerns that some individuals are beginning to advocate antitrinitarian views not supported by Scripture. I hope that the articles will be helpful in addressing the topic and that the resources listed (pp. 19–22) will provide additional material for you.

Sound theology is critical for a healthy church. This body—the church—will be healthy if we allow the Spirit to guide us in our theological journey. That's the promise that God has made to us. **M**

*Tell us what you think about this editorial. Email us at [MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org](mailto:MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org) or write to us at 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904.*

# The Trinity in Seventh- day Adventist history

Merlin D. Burt



*Merlin D. Burt, PhD,  
is director of the  
Center for Adventist  
Research,  
Andrews University,  
Berrien Springs,  
Michigan,  
United States.*

**T**he last decade has seen increased antitrinitarian activity within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Four reasons for this activity should be mentioned. (1) The availability of information through the Internet. (2) Several other Adventist groups that emerged from the Millerite movement continue to hold to an antitrinitarian perspective. Examples would be the Church of God (Seventh Day), also known as the Marion Party; the previous view of the Worldwide Church of God; the Atlanta Church of God in Georgia (formerly of Oregon, Illinois, or the Age to Come Adventists), and Jehovah's Witnesses (that branched from the Advent Christian Church). It should be noted that the Advent Christians, like Seventh-day Adventists, have embraced the trinitarian view. (3) Some think that the Trinity doctrine comes from Catholic theology and therefore must be false. Many have not realized that the Catholic doctrine of the Trinity has differences from the Seventh-day Adventist biblical doctrine of the Trinity. These include eternal generation of the Son and Divine impassibility, which are influenced by Greek philosophy. (4) Perhaps most significant, over the last few decades, some Seventh-day Adventists have thought to return to early historical Adventist faith, or what might be called neo-restorationism.

Some have failed to recognize the dynamic nature of Seventh-day Adventist theology. Historically, our doctrines have developed in the context of the original distinctive core of the three angels' messages and kindred concepts.

A small, though significant and growing segment of "historic" Adventists, are advocating a return to an antitrinitarian stance. Sabbatarian Adventism and Seventh-day Adventists have always been Bible-centered in their theology and doctrine. They have rejected a static creed and have ever sought to study, understand, and follow the Bible as the source of doctrine and the guide for experience. Consequently, it should not be surprising that Adventist doctrine has developed over time building upon previous and new Bible study.

As Sabbatarian Adventism emerged during the late 1840s, it brought various Christian truths and placed them in the framework of fulfilled prophecy and ongoing discovery of biblical teachings. A cluster of biblical teachings explained what had happened in 1844 and why Jesus had not come. The heavenly sanctuary, the end-time ministry of Jesus in the Most Holy Place, and the Sabbath as the seal of God were a particular focus. Adventist understanding of various theological perspectives continued to develop and improve over time. Two examples are the Sabbath and tithing. Early Adventists initially concluded, through Joseph Bates's influence, that the Sabbath should begin and end at 6:00 P.M. It was in 1855, nearly a decade after the initial Sabbath emphasis, that J. N. Andrews's biblical and historical presentation influenced believers to adopt sundown as the correct time to begin and end the Sabbath. Tithing first began in 1859 as systematic benevolence and had little or no link to the biblical teaching of 10 percent. It was not until the 1870s that a careful restudy of the topic led Seventh-day Adventists to adopt the tithing framework we practice today. A similar process is evident in Adventist understanding on the nature of God and the Trinity.

The purpose of this article is to outline the historical development of the Trinity view of Seventh-day Adventists from its beginning to the present day.

## **Up to 1890: Antitrinitarian period**

Until near the turn of the twentieth century, Seventh-day Adventist literature was almost unanimous in opposing the eternal deity of Jesus and the personhood of the Holy Spirit. During the earlier years, some even held the view that Christ was created. It is very important to understand that Adventist views were not homogeneous. Theological tension within Adventism began during the Millerite movement and is illustrated by the two principal leaders, William Miller and Joshua V. Himes.

Miller, being a Baptist, was a trinitarian. He wrote, "I believe in one living and true God, and that there are three persons in the Godhead. . . . The three persons of the Triune God are connected."<sup>1</sup> Himes, a close associate of William Miller, was of the Christian Connexion persuasion. The northeastern branch of the Christian church "rejected the Trinitarian doctrine as unscriptural."<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that Millerite Adventists were focused on the soon coming of Jesus and did not consider it necessary to argue about the Trinity.

Though James White rejected the doctrine of the Trinity, he did believe in the three great Powers in heaven reflected in his first hymnbook.<sup>6</sup> Though opposed to the Trinity, he did not believe that Christ was inferior to the Father. In 1877 he wrote, "The inexplicable trinity that makes the godhead three in one and one in three, is bad enough; but that ultra Unitarianism that makes Christ inferior to the Father is worse."<sup>7</sup>

Not all agreed with James White on the equality of Father and Son. During the 1860s, Uriah Smith, long-time editor of the *Review and Herald*, believed that

the Father by blurring the distinction between Them. While the early positions on the Trinity and deity of Christ were flawed, there was a sincere attempt to oppose certain legitimate errors.

By about 1890, Adventists had come to a more-or-less harmonious position that viewed Jesus as the begotten or originated Divine Son of God. He was seen as the Divine Creator with the Father. The nature of the Holy Spirit was lightly discussed, though the Holy Spirit was generally considered to be the omnipresent influence from the Father or the Son rather than a person.

## WE MUST ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THE DEVELOPMENT OF ADVENTIST THEOLOGY HAS USUALLY BEEN PROGRESSIVE AND CORRECTIVE. THIS IS CLEARLY ILLUSTRATED IN THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY.

Two of the principal founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Joseph Bates and James White, like Himes, had been members of the Christian Connexion and rejected the doctrine of the Trinity. Joseph Bates wrote of his views, "Respecting the trinity, I concluded that it was an impossibility for me to believe that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, was also the Almighty God."<sup>3</sup> James White wrote, "Here we might mention the Trinity, which does away [with] the personality of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ."<sup>4</sup> Both Bates and White were anxious to maintain the separate personalities of the Father and the Son. This concern was caused, in part, by the strong spiritualizing influence among Bridegroom Adventists during 1845 and 1846. A similar problem would resurface around the turn of the twentieth century with the de-personalizing of God and J. H. Kellogg's pantheistic views.<sup>5</sup>

Jesus was "the first created being."<sup>8</sup> By 1881, he had changed to the belief that Jesus was "begotten" and not created.<sup>9</sup>

A selective list of Adventists who either spoke against the Trinity and/or rejected the eternal deity of Christ include J. B. Frisbie, J. N. Loughborough, R. F. Cottrell, J. N. Andrews, D. M. Canright, J. H. Waggoner, and C. W. Stone.<sup>10</sup> W. A. Spicer at one point told A. W. Spalding that his father, after becoming a Seventh-day Adventist (he was formerly a Seventh Day Baptist minister), "grew so offended at the antitrinitarian atmosphere in Battle Creek that he ceased preaching."<sup>11</sup>

In surveying the writings of various pioneers, certain concerns frequently appear. In rejecting the Trinity, some saw the orthodox Christian view as pagan tritheism. Others argued that the Trinity degraded the personhood of Christ and

### From 1890 to 1900: Emergence of trinitarian sentiment

As the 1890s began, two of the key thinkers on each side of the righteousness by faith/law in Galatians issue agreed on the derived divinity of Jesus. E. J. Waggoner wrote in his 1890 *Christ and His Righteousness*, "There was a time when Christ proceeded forth and came from God . . . but that time was so far back in the days of eternity that to finite comprehension it is practically without beginning."<sup>12</sup> In 1898, Uriah Smith wrote in *Looking Unto Jesus*, "God alone is without beginning. At the earliest epoch when a beginning could be,—a period so remote that to finite minds it is essentially eternity,—appeared the Word."<sup>13</sup>

The period after the 1888 Minneapolis General Conference saw a new emphasis on Jesus and the plan of salvation. This led to a consideration

of His deity and what it meant for the redemption of humanity. A. T. Jones was among the first (with the exception of Ellen White) to suggest that Christ was eternally preexistent. Jones emphasized Colossians 2:9 and the idea that in Christ was the “fullness of the Godhead bodily.” He also described Christ as “ ‘the eternal Word.’ ”<sup>14</sup> Though he avoided the word *Trinity*, in 1899 he wrote, “God is one. Jesus Christ is one. The Holy Spirit is one. And these three are one: there is no dissent nor division among them.”<sup>15</sup>

Ellen White played a prophetic role in confirming the eternal deity of Jesus and the Three-Person Godhead. As early as 1878, she referred to Jesus as the “eternal Son of God.”<sup>16</sup> In *The Desire of Ages*, she wrote, “[Christ] announced Himself to be the self-existent One” and “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived.”<sup>17</sup> She wrote of the Holy Spirit as the “Third Person of the Godhead.”<sup>18</sup> Ellen White played an important role in urging the church toward a biblical trinitarian position. However, for years after the publication of *The Desire of Ages*, the church generally avoided these and other statements. While she never used the term *Trinity* in her published writings, she repeatedly conveyed the concept.

M. L. Andreasen questioned whether Ellen White had actually written some of her statements in *The Desire of Ages* and other books. During 1909, Andreasen spent three months at Elmhaven, California, and was convinced of the accuracy of her published position.<sup>19</sup>

### From 1900 to 1931: Transition and conflict

During the first three decades of the twentieth century, the church remained divided in its position on the deity of Christ. The use of the word *Trinity* in print

continued to be avoided. W. W. Prescott and A. T. Jones, both editors of the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, were key supporters of the full and eternal deity of Jesus. During the 1890s, Prescott was slower than Jones to accept the new view. But after 1900, as editor of the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, he published articles on the personhood and eternal



nature of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.<sup>20</sup> Still Prescott believed that Jesus had a derived existence from God the Father. At the 1919 Bible Conference, he presented a series of eight devotionals for the conference titled “The Person of Christ” that expressed this view. Careful discussion at this conference showed that there were varying opinions.<sup>21</sup>

The early twentieth century saw Adventists and Protestant Fundamentalists battling higher criticism and the “new modernism” growing in Christianity. Liberalism rejected the deity of Jesus and His virgin birth. Adventist articles defending the Bible view began to appear more frequently in church

papers. Irrespective of individual differences on details, Adventist ministers pulled into line against liberal views. Naturally, those who rejected the eternal preexistence of Christ did not want to speak of His beginning and weaken the argument against higher criticism. Even articles on the Trinity were tolerated.<sup>22</sup> The result was an increased appreciation of the full deity of the Son of God.

### From 1931 to 1957: Acceptance of the trinitarian view

F. M. Wilcox was crucial in facilitating the final transition to an accepted Seventh-day Adventist view on the Trinity through his guidance in the 1931 Statement of Fundamental Beliefs and his articles in the *Review and Herald*.<sup>23</sup> Doctrinal summaries were carefully avoided during the first decades of the twentieth century, due in part to conflict on the Trinity. According to L. E. Froom, Wilcox was “respected by all parties for his soundness, integrity, and loyalty to the Advent Faith—and to the Spirit of Prophecy—he, as editor of the *Review*, did what probably no other man could have done to achieve unity in acceptance.”<sup>24</sup> It was not until 1946 that the General

Conference session officially voted a Statement of Fundamental Beliefs.<sup>25</sup>

During the 1940s, an ever-increasing majority of the church believed in the eternal, underived deity of Christ and the personhood of the Holy Spirit, yet there were some who held back and even actively resisted the change. These were mainly comprised of a few older ministers and Bible teachers such as J. S. Washburn, C. S. Longacre, and W. R. French. In 1944, Uriah Smith’s *Daniel and the Revelation* was revised and his comments on the derived nature of Christ’s divinity were removed.<sup>26</sup>

In 1957, the book *Questions on Doctrine* anchored the doctrine of the

Trinity or Godhead for Adventists. While the book produced theological conflict in other areas, there was virtually no dissent on the book's clear teaching of the Trinity.<sup>27</sup> The current unambiguous statement on the Trinity in the Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs was revised and voted at the 1980 General Conference Session.

The process of adopting the Trinity continued from 1900 to 1950. Key influences in the change were (1) repeated published biblical studies on the topic, (2) Ellen White's clear statements, (3) Adventist response to the attacks of modern liberalism on the deity of Christ and His virgin birth, and (4) F. M. Wilcox's statement of Fundamental Beliefs and his *Review and Herald* editorials.

We may learn several lessons from the history of the development of doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. First, we must acknowledge that the development of Adventist theology has usually been progressive and corrective. This is clearly illustrated in the doctrine of the Trinity. The leading of the Holy Spirit is dynamic. Other doctrinal concepts developed in a similar manner. This development never supposed a paradigm shift that contradicted the clear biblical teaching of the heavenly sanctuary ministry of Jesus and the prophetic foundation of the church. Second, the development of the Trinity doctrine demonstrates that doctrinal change sometimes requires the passing of a previous generation. For Seventh-day Adventists, it took more than 50 years for the doctrine of the Trinity to become normative. Third, Ellen White's unambiguous statements subdued controversy and provided confidence to transition to our current view. Finally, Adventist theology is always supremely dependent upon Scripture. The Bible tells us that the "path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."<sup>28</sup> Hebrews 2:1 reads, "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard." It was ultimately the Bible that led Seventh-day Adventists to adopt their present position on the Godhead or Trinity. ■

- 1 Sylvester Bliss, *Memoirs of William Miller* (Boston: Joshua V. Himes, 1853), 77, 78.
- 2 Joshua V. Himes, "Christian Connexion," in *Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, ed. J. Newton Brown (Battletown, VT: Battletown Typographic, 1838), 363.
- 3 Joseph Bates, *Autobiography of Elder Joseph Bates* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1868), 205.
- 4 James White, "Preach the Word," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 11, 1855, 85.
- 5 See J. H. Kellogg, *The Living Temple* (Battle Creek, MI: Good Health, 1903), 26-36, 396-398, 450-460, 484-486.
- 6 Arthur L. White to Hedy Jemison, July 2, 1969; James White, comp., *Hymns for God's Peculiar People* (Oswego, NY: Richard Oliphant, 1849), 47.
- 7 James White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, November 29, 1877, 72.
- 8 Uriah Smith, *Thoughts, Critical and Practical on the Book of Revelation* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1865), 59.
- 9 Smith, *Thoughts*, 1881, 74.
- 10 J. B. Frisbie, "The Seventh Day Sabbath Not Abolished," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, March 7, 1854, 50; J. N. Loughborough, "Questions for Brother Loughborough," *Advent Review Sabbath and Herald*, November 5, 1861, 184; R. F. Cottrell, "The Trinity," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, July 6, 1869, 10, 11; J. N. Andrews, "Melchisedec," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, September 7, 1869, 84; D. M. Canright, "The Personality of God," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, August 29, 1878, 73, 74; September 5, 1878, 81, 82; September 12, 1878, 89, 90; September 19, 1878, 97; J. H. Waggoner, *The Atonement* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 1884), 164-179; C. W. Stone, *The Captain of our Salvation* (Battle Creek, MI: n.p., 1886), 15-20.
- 11 A. W. Spalding to H. C. Lacey, June 2, 1947.
- 12 E. J. Waggoner, *Christ and His Righteousness* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 1890), 21, 22.
- 13 Uriah Smith, *Looking Unto Jesus* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1898), 10.
- 14 A. T. Jones, "The Third Angel's Message Number 20," *General Conference Bulletin*, February 27, 1895, 378; *ibid.*, "The Third Angel's Message Number 17," *General Conference Bulletin*, February 25, 1895, 332.
- 15 A. T. Jones, editorial, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, January 10, 1899, 24.
- 16 Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, August 8, 1878, 49.
- 17 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1898), 470, 530.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 671.
- 19 M. L. Andreasen, "Testimony of M. L. Andreasen," Ellen G. White Estate Document File 961, October 15, 1953.
- 20 W. W. Prescott, *Review and Herald*, April 4, 1896, 232; General Conference Committee Minutes for February 15, 1902, cited in Gilbert Valentine, *William Warren Prescott* (PhD dissertation, Andrews University, 1982), 351; W. W. Prescott, "Studies in the Gospel Message," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, September 2, 1902, 4; *ibid.*, "Our Place as Sons," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, September 23, 1902, 6; *ibid.*, "The Eternal Purpose," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 23, 1902, 4; *ibid.*, "Our Personal Saviour Jesus Christ," *Sabbath School Lesson Quarterly*, first quarter, 1921, 2, 9, 20; *ibid.*, *The Doctrine of Christ* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1920), 3, 20, 21.
- 21 Donald E. Mansell, "How the 1919 Bible Conference Transcript Was Found," Unpublished Paper, Ellen G. White Estate Document File, July 6, 1975.
- 22 Stemple White, *Canadian Watchman*, September 1923, 18; C. P. Bollman, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, March 15, 1923, 4; Lyle C. Shepard, *Canadian Watchman*, September 1927, 12.
- 23 F. M. Wilcox, "Christ as Creator and Redeemer," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, March 23, 1944, 2; *ibid.*, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, January 3, 1945, 5, 6.
- 24 L. E. Froom, *Movement of Destiny* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1971), 413, 415.
- 25 Robert Olson and Bert Haloviak, "Who Decides What Adventists Believe: A Chronological Survey of Sources, 1844-1977," Unpublished paper, Ellen G. White Estate Document File 326, February 24, 1977.
- 26 Uriah Smith, *Daniel and the Revelation* (Nashville: Southern Publishing, 1941), 400; *ibid.*, *The Prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation* (Nashville: Southern Publishing, 1944), 391.
- 27 *Questions on Doctrine* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1957), 30, 31, 36.
- 28 Proverbs 4:18, KJV.

Tell us what you think about this article. Email us at [MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org](mailto:MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org) or write to us at 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904.



Visit our newly redesigned Web site at:  
**[www.ministrymagazine.org](http://www.ministrymagazine.org)**

# A trinitarian view of the Cross

John C. Johnson

*Editor's note: The following article was one of our ministerial student writing contest winning submissions.*

Ever since Georg Hegel, Karl Barth, and Karl Rahner, the doctrine of the Trinity has enjoyed a recent surge in theological reflection. However, the issue of the Trinity *at the specific moment of the Cross*—where the purpose of the Incarnation climaxes—has been rarely touched. There have been a few notable contributors, such as Jürgen Moltmann and Eberhard Jüngel, but otherwise the topic, for the most part, has been left alone. Many reasons exist for this void; however, many abound for why we should penetrate the depths of the relational trinitarian dynamic present at the Cross.

First, the Cross represents one of the primary modes of revelation concerning the triune God. Second, our knowledge of the nature of God can be greatly enriched by a deeper understanding of what happened at the Cross. And, finally, the realization of the magnitude of what transpired at the Cross is more than worth the effort in terms of teaching and preaching value.

This article, then, will examine three significant biblical passages on the issue of the Trinity at the Cross, explore the relevant theologians on the topic, and offer feedback on the proposals of these theologians in the discussion. Further, I will make one addition concerning the current discussion on the role of the Holy Spirit at the Cross.

## Jesus at Gethsemane

Let us first look at some key biblical passages that illuminate the activity of the Trinity at the Cross.<sup>1</sup> A few portions of Scripture stand out: the account of Jesus' prayer at Gethsemane, His cry of dereliction on the cross, and Hebrews 9:14.

Howard Marshall places the real struggle for Jesus at the moment of His prayer to the Father when He asks that the cup be taken from Him. Here Jesus comes to terms with His fate, so to speak—and, having done so, is then able to endure with incredible poise what lies ahead.<sup>2</sup> For Marshall, this makes sense because, after this moment, Jesus' will is in total alignment with the Father's and He sets His eyes on the goal for which He came. In other words, this change does not diminish the utter desolation and anguish of the Cross but simply portrays Jesus' mind as made up.<sup>3</sup>

Peter Bolt notes the allusion to Psalm 42 in Jesus' "agitation" and "distress," with the "where-is-your-God" cry asked by the psalmist.<sup>4</sup> Bolt explains this instance as when Jesus prepares for the cosmic battle, which mandates some kind of disruption between Himself and the Father.<sup>5</sup> Not only must there be a disruption, but the future of the entire world, the future of the human race, our whole existence is wrapped up in this passionate exchange between the Son and His Father.<sup>6</sup>

John Nolland believes, however, that Jesus made up His mind well before the prayer at Gethsemane. Rather, while the disciples at the Last Supper participated in the benefits of Christ's death, Jesus drank the cup of commitment—commitment to His coming death on the cross.<sup>7</sup>

Further clarification of what unfolded in Jesus' prayer can be gleaned from the imagery of the "cup." In the biblical world, the cup could convey the benefits that God provides, such as love, comfort, strength, and fellowship (Pss. 16:5; 116:3; 1 Cor. 10:16).<sup>8</sup> The cup can also represent, and more often does, the judgment of God upon sin (Isa. 51:17, 22; Jer. 25:15, 16; Eze. 23:31–34; Mark 14:36).<sup>9</sup> In these examples, God punishes people by making them drunk (a seemingly mild consequence for many). In context, however, God plays the role, not of the generous host who welcomes guests but, rather, as the One who hands down destruction.<sup>10</sup> Thus, when Jesus cries out to the Father to take away the cup, it must be seen as the growing anguish (emotion) from the full weight of the Father's anger against sin that will soon fall on His shoulders.<sup>11</sup>



*John C. Johnson is pursuing a Master of Divinity degree, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, Missouri, United States.*

## Jesus on the cross

Jesus knows this anger, because He experienced it Himself on the cross when He cried out, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” Many have struggled with the meaning of this cry. Donald Hagner laments the impossibility of understanding what this meant to Jesus; for, he asserts, these words contain one of the most impenetrable mysteries of the entire Gospel narrative.<sup>12</sup> Hagner further says that, perhaps, the words should stand as they are—stark in their incomprehensibility to our finite minds.<sup>13</sup>

However, much can be deduced from the cry. For instance, there’s the obvious connection to Psalm 22 from which Jesus quotes.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, these words of Jesus have had many and varied interpretations, but no substantial reasons exist for not reading the pessimistic pathos literally in which Jesus expresses torment on account of the Father forsaking Him.<sup>15</sup>

## The Holy Spirit and Calvary

Thus far, the first two passages have dealt specifically (perhaps not as specific

as we would like) with the relationship between the Father and the Son at the Cross.

Hebrews 9:14 gives us an insightful glance into what or where the Holy Spirit was during this moment: “the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God.”<sup>16</sup> Here the Holy Spirit is seen as continuing His empowering work that had been carried out throughout Jesus’ ministry, even up to Christ’s death.<sup>17</sup> This must be seen as a mission of the Holy Spirit, that is, to empower Christ, as He does all believers, yet on the scale of *par excellence*.

This two-directional hermeneutic (Christ’s and the Spirit’s missions) does not threaten Christology or the Cross, when positioned within the salvific paradigm of “from Father back to Father.”<sup>18</sup> In fact, the Spirit’s mission here must be interpreted this way or the Trinity collapses on the side of subordinationism.<sup>19</sup> McDonnell writes, “both Christ and the Spirit are at the center but in different ways: Christ as the ‘what’ and the Spirit as the ‘how.’”<sup>20</sup>

This fact serves as a pivotal reminder that as the Christ, God in the flesh, needed the Holy Spirit to walk with Him daily for ministry, so do we, but ever more so.

## The Trinity and Calvary

After this brief overview of three main texts concerning the personal relationship between Father, Son, and Spirit at the Cross, we can unpack the dynamic a little more.<sup>21</sup> Moltmann sees both the Father and the Son suffering at the Cross and detects that the divine consistency is at stake, the inner life of the Trinity. At the Cross, the self-communicating love of the Father becomes infinite pain over the death of the Son. Likewise, the responding love of the Son converts into infinite suffering over being forsaken by the Father. What happens at the Cross reaches into the very depths of the infinite Godhead and, therefore, puts its impress on the trinitarian life of God for eternity.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, for Moltmann, an almost drastic shift exists from *apatheia* (the idea that God cannot suffer) to suffering,

# Developing a User-friendly Church

## Sermon Titles:

- What Do You See?
- Getting Over It
- Whose Fault?
- That They May Be One
- Don’t Make It Difficult

## Bonus Features:

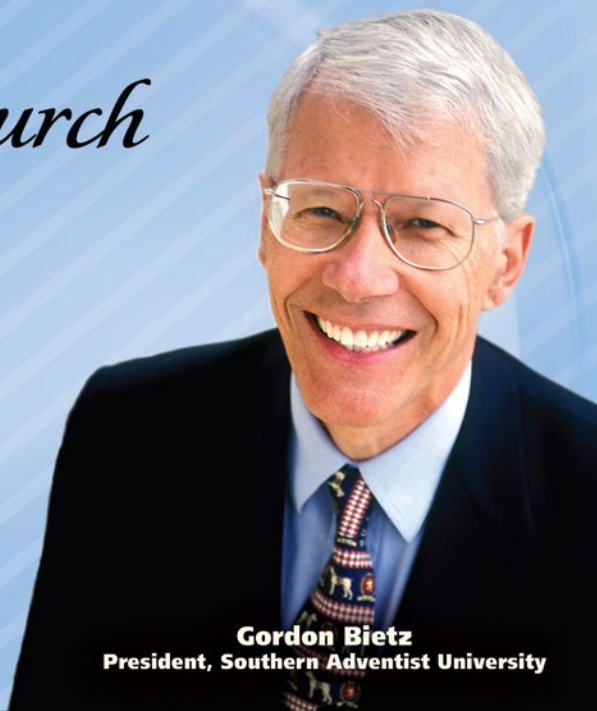
Gordon Bietz: The Man and His Mission

Tour: Southern Adventist University campus

Bietz concludes each sermon with an illustration from his Fenton Forest Friends.



*Adventist Preaching*



**Gordon Bietz**  
President, Southern Adventist University

Order the 2-DVD set, Vol 23 - \$24.95 + sh/h • For more information and to order:

AdventistPreaching.com • AdventSource.org or 800-328-0525 • ABCs

which becomes the foremost aspect of the trinitarian doctrine. Moltmann claims a God who cannot suffer cannot love, and that a God who cannot love is a dead God. Thus, a self-imposed limitation surfaces that makes the relationship within the Godhead, and with us, meaningful. God has something at stake in all this.<sup>23</sup> Further, this God-forsakenness and patricompassionism are not merely mirages with which to identify, but rather events that take place *in* God, a dialectic where He takes everything of the “far country” (all that is opposed to God) into Himself in order to overcome it.<sup>24</sup>

The impact of this constant inner voice must *not* be understated or neglected in the light of Him being the One and only elect of God in such communion with the Father and Spirit that this would indeed be a severe struggle within the inner-trinitarian life.

The struggle is clearly felt not only on one side but among both the Father and the Son. Gérard Rossé points to the non-intervention of the Father on the cross as a revelation of Himself, not despite His silence but because of His inactivity. The abandonment of the Son should be seen positively as the culminating expression of the Father’s

At such a crucial time, when the unity of the Godhead is most at jeopardy because of the necessary abandonment, the Spirit becomes the link, the glue that preserves the blessed unity of the Trinity.<sup>31</sup> With Moltmann, one finds that the Spirit is the link, but he gives more focus to the communion of the wills as pointing to the Divine Unity at the Cross. Also, the Spirit for Moltmann plays a vital role in the action of bringing all God-forsakenness *into* the divine being and transforming it.<sup>32</sup> Thompson gives a warranted critique of Moltmann on this point, recognizing that for Moltmann the triune God is an evolving subject

## WHAT HAPPENS AT THE CROSS REACHES INTO THE VERY DEPTHS OF THE INFINITE GODHEAD AND, THEREFORE, PUTS ITS IMPRESS ON THE TRINITARIAN LIFE OF GOD FOR ETERNITY.

Moltmann is not the only theologian taking up the theme of suffering at the Cross. Hans Urs von Balthasar contends that, in some way, all Three Persons of the Trinity suffer at the Cross.<sup>25</sup> For Jüngel, there seems to be an implicit suffering in the very fact that God is love. Barth exclaims, unconditionally, that, as a sinner, God rejects Jesus. Jesus stands not only under the wrath of God, but because wrath is necessary, Jesus stands under God’s sentence and judgment.<sup>26</sup> Further, He knows that He must perish; He considers that He must die and, thus, He is not merely in the grip of death, but from the depth of His election, He must constantly hear the voice that reinforces the knowledge that He is in the grip of death, and that He is lost.<sup>27</sup>

love for the Son.<sup>28</sup> By not intervening at the Cross, the Father actually carried out the sacrifice that Abraham almost did with Isaac, an act that certainly caused the Father great suffering. John 3:16 says that God the Father *gave* His only Son, and Brown notices that in this verse, the role of the Father becomes prominent.<sup>29</sup> In this act, the Father gives His Son and risks, as Moltmann would argue, the very consistency of the inner-trinitarian life itself.

The Holy Spirit also takes part in this risk during those few short hours at the Cross. If the Father risks something by standing by idly, then the Holy Spirit has just as much at stake. Jüngel sees the Holy Spirit at the Cross as the bond of love that holds the Trinity together.<sup>30</sup>

who in Moltmann’s theology borders on tritheism (three separate gods).<sup>33</sup>

We move back now to Hebrews 9:14. If Jesus was empowered throughout His ministry from baptism through the healings, teaching, and raising others from the dead, then surely the Holy Spirit contributed more in the ministry of the Cross than simply being glue. Rather, without the empowerment of the Holy Spirit living within Jesus, and in complete unity, perhaps Christ would have succumbed to pushing the cup aside. In all Three Persons, the total self-giving is so evident that, in this case, the Holy Spirit gives of Himself fully to the Son in order to strengthen Him for what lays ahead—the Cross. Thus, while the Spirit may be the bond

of love between the Father, Son, and Spirit at the Cross,<sup>34</sup> He also became the empowering Presence within Jesus that enables His humanity to endure the cup of suffering and triumph faithfully.

## Conclusion

A trinitarian look at the Cross gives us an insight into the community that is the Trinity, and this can serve as the paradigm for our communal thinking (eternal self-sacrifice). A beneficial approach to the issue of the Trinity at the Cross is one that adopts a modified Moltmannian view,<sup>35</sup> which takes more seriously the work of the Holy Spirit at the Cross. The components of Jesus' bearing the cup of suffering and the anguish it caused Him, the suffering of the Father in giving up His one and only Son, and the Spirit's empowering bond are all pivotal factors in God's work of redeeming a lost race. At the Cross we have the clearest exposition of who our sacrificing God truly is.

As Alister McGrath stated, the Cross forces us to make a decision: To seek God here, in the apparent defeat of the God-man and abandonment of the Son by the Father at the Cross, or to seek Him elsewhere.<sup>36</sup> ■

1 All Scripture quotations have been taken from the ESV unless otherwise noted.

2 I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, eds. I. Howard Marshall & W. Ward Gasque (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1978), 828.

3 Ibid.

4 Peter G. Bolt, "The Cross: Where God Comes Close," in *The Cross From a Distance: Atonement in Mark's Gospel* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 109.

5 Ibid., 108, 109.

6 Ibid., 110.

7 John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, eds. I. Howard Marshall & W. Ward Gasque (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 1099.

8 *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, eds. Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 186, s.v. "Cup."

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid. It should also be noted that those who do not take Jesus' sacrifice seriously or reject it completely will drink the cup of God's judgment (1 Cor. 11:27–30; Rev. 17:3–6; 18:6–8).

12 Donald Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, Word Biblical Commentary, eds. Bruce Metzger, et al. (Dallas, TX: Word, Inc., 1995), 844, 846.

13 Ibid., 846.

14 Raymond E. Brown, "Jesus Crucified, Part Three: Last Events, Death," in *The Death of the Messiah*, vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 1044.

15 Ibid., 1047. Brown in typical fashion gives the gamut of arguments against the literal interpretation of which none are compelling. Most frequent is that Jesus is quoting the psalm and the listener/reader should immediately know and jump to the last verse of the psalm. While this hermeneutic principle is valid in some New Testament instances, in this case it would necessitate the reader recognizing the one verse as a psalm, knowing which psalm, know the entire psalm, detect in the agonizing reference an allusion to the triumph, and finally, in essence, read the exact opposite meaning into the words than what is there. Further, taking the words literally does not in any way diminish Christ's deity. Bolt also gives a good summary of the attempts to evade the literal meaning in *The Cross From a Distance*, 127–30. As does John Stott—pointing out the claims that the cry is simply a cry of anger, unbelief, or despair; that it is a cry of loneliness; or the common, cry of victory. John R. W. Stott, "Looking Below the Surface," in *The Cross of Christ* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 63–84. Moltmann in a different approach gives six answers to the question of where God is during the cry. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 151–211.

16 It is no coincidence that in regards to the Holy Spirit, we are nearly relying on one word, *dia*, for our perspective of the action of the Holy Spirit at the Cross. For of the Three Persons of the Trinity the Holy Spirit is the One who is completely intangible and unseen, distinguished from the humanity of Jesus and the frequent interaction with YHWH, the Father of Jesus. This study is somewhat of an effort to find what the role of the Spirit was in the moment of the Cross. Precious few ideas have been offered, namely from Moltmann and Jüngel.

17 Anthony D. Palma, "The Spirit and the Messiah," in *The Holy Spirit: A Pentecostal Perspective* (Springfield, MO: Logion Press, 2001), 51.

18 Kilian McDonnell, "A Trinitarian Theology of the Holy Spirit?" *Theological Studies* 46, no. 2 (June 1985): 210–212.

19 Ibid., 226.

20 Ibid., 227.

21 I will from here on assume the position with Moltmann, Barth, Jüngel, and others that the Trinity is the mystery of salvation and the salvation comes through the Cross and thus the Cross is the basis/key for understanding the nature and acts of the triune God. However, His being is not determined by these acts at the Cross as others will say.

22 Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 173.

23 Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (London: SCM Press, 1981), 38.

24 Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (London: SCM

Press, 1974); John Thompson, "A Trinitarian Theology of Cross and Resurrection," in *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 61. Others would disagree with Moltmann on this point of God taking into Himself the opposition. For example, Barth in dealing with the *communicatio idiomatum* thought that God had in His nature those aspects which enable Him to remain Himself while entering into the human predicament as reconciler. Jüngel then would say that "God is able to suffer and die as man," while remaining ontologically Himself. Quoted in Thompson, 56, 57.

25 Although for Balthasar the nature of God's love is also transformed at the Cross, becoming somehow greater, at least enriched. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, trans. Aidan Nichols (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 136–147.

26 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. G.W. Bromiley, vol. 2, pt. 1 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956).

27 Ibid.

28 Gérard Rossé, *The Cry of Jesus on the cross: A Biblical and Theological Study* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 133.

29 Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 2d ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 147.

30 Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, trans. Darrell L. Guder (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983).

31 Badcock asserts that Jüngel's approach in defining God at the event of the Cross is both the strength and the weakness of his argument. For the relation between the immanent and economic Trinity must be recognized, but to say that God is ontologically defined by actions in time and space is to make Him contingent on His own creation. Moltmann also makes clear in his writings that the triune God is to some extent not complete until the end. Gary D. Badcock, "The Holy Spirit in Contemporary Trinitarian Theology," in *Light of Truth & Fire of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 170–211.

32 Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 122–128.

33 Thompson, 51.

34 I think it better to simply add the Holy Spirit to the objects being bonded. Then there is a self-inclusive union and no implicit diminution. It is recognized that there is not intended subordination but the language is hard to escape especially if you are building the trinitarian doctrine from the event of the Cross (Jüngel).

35 Namely the idea that the Trinity is an evolving event not yet complete and the warning that he is often too focused on the Three separate Persons while the unity slips away must be heeded.

36 Alister McGrath, "The Crucified and Hidden God," in *The Mystery of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), 102.

Tell us what you think about this article. Email us at [MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org](mailto:MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org) or write to us at 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904.

# The trinitarian basis of Christian community

Richard Rice



*Richard Rice, PhD, is professor of theology, Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, California, United States.*

**I**n contrast to some other Seventh-day Adventist doctrines that have undergone change, the Trinity has not been a source of notable controversy over the years. The church's affirmation of righteousness by faith emerged during the 1888 General Conference, remembered for sharp interactions and subsequent turmoil. The discussions of Christ's nature that followed the publication of *Questions on Doctrine* in the 1950s, were particularly strident. But the church's progress toward full-fledged trinitarianism never generated, or degenerated, into similar disputes. Though it has been relatively quiet, no development in Adventist history has greater theological significance, for nothing is more fundamental to any version of Christian faith than its understanding of God.<sup>1</sup>

A trinitarian understanding of God has important implications for the entire range of beliefs, but its connection to the doctrine of the church is particularly significant. In fact, the Trinity and the church are intimately connected. It was the experience of God within the community of faith that gave rise to the trinitarian understanding of God. And a trinitarian understanding of God illuminates the origin and the nature of the church, as well as having important implications for the practical life of the Christian community.

## **The Trinity and the origin of the church**

According to an ancient formula, all of God is involved in the activity of each Member of the

Trinity. God works through both the Son and the Spirit to bring the church into existence. As Martin Luther asserted, "It is the proper work of the Holy Spirit, to make the church."<sup>2</sup> This joint activity is sometimes described as "two divine missions"—the sending of the Son and the sending of the Spirit—and these two missions are closely related.<sup>3</sup>

The Spirit's role in the events of the early church is well known. The book of Acts begins with the promise of the Spirit's coming (1:5, 8). Soon after, Pentecost empowered the early believers, enabling them to speak in other tongues and "[proclaim] the word of God with boldness" (4:31).<sup>4</sup> Time and again, Acts describes Christians as being "filled with the Holy Spirit" (2:4; 4:31; 7:55). The Holy Spirit directed Christians to travel and preach, fell on Gentile believers, and convinced church leaders what sort of obligations Gentiles should assume when they joined the Christian community (15:28, 29). The sheer number of references suggests that the central character in the book is actually the Holy Spirit, rather than the apostles and the others who followed Jesus.

Although we think of the Holy Spirit as descending on Jesus' followers after His earthly ministry was over, the Spirit's activity in the early church was really a continuation of the Spirit's activity in Jesus' life. Indeed, the overall purpose of Luke and Acts may well be to show that the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of early Christians really became an extension of the Holy Spirit's work within the life of Jesus Himself.

The Holy Spirit was a factor in Jesus' life from beginning to end. The activity of the Spirit surrounded Jesus' birth. In the early chapters of Luke, we read that John the Baptist (1:15), Elizabeth (v. 41), and Zechariah (v. 67) were all filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gave Simeon special insight and prompted him to go into the temple at the right moment (2:25, 26).<sup>5</sup> And of course, in the middle of all this was the greatest manifestation of all—the miraculous birth of Jesus. "The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God' " (1:35).<sup>6</sup> Jesus would be full of the Holy Spirit from His birth, just as John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit while in his mother's womb (Luke 1:15; cf. Judg. 13:3–5; 16:17; Isa. 44:2).

According to Acts 10:38, God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. The Spirit descended on Jesus at His baptism

and remained for His entire earthly life. Jesus was “full of the Holy Spirit,” and the Spirit led him into the wilderness, to be tempted (Luke 4:1, 2; Matt. 4:1). In His synagogue sermon at Nazareth (Luke 4), Jesus announced, “ ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. . . .’ ” (v. 18).<sup>7</sup> Later on, Jesus “rejoiced in the Holy Spirit,” following the mission of the seventy-two (10:21).<sup>8</sup> The Holy Spirit was also active in Jesus’ death and resurrection. According to Hebrews 9:14, Christ offered Himself to God “through the eternal Spirit.”<sup>9</sup> And in Romans 1:4, Jesus “was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead.”

On the day of His resurrection, Jesus “breathed” on His followers and said, “ ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’ ” (John 20:22). The same power at work during His earthly life continues in the life of the community He founded, and through the Spirit, Christ maintains His presence in the world. Accordingly, Christ’s followers live by the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul puts it this way: “The Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit, that dwells in you” (Rom. 8:11). Through the Holy Spirit, therefore, believers live the resurrection life now, not just in the future. The Holy Spirit gives them a new dynamic for living, a new inner power, a new life, the life of the resurrection (see 2 Cor. 5:17).

Moreover, the Holy Spirit binds Christ’s followers to Him with ties that can never be broken. He lives in them (“Christ in you”); they live in Him (“the life I now live I live by Christ”), and because of its connection to Christ’s ministry in the world, the Holy Spirit receives a new identity—the “spirit of Christ.” We can see these interconnecting ideas at work in passages such as Romans 8:9, 10. As one biblical scholar puts it, “Abiding in Christ . . . is also abiding in the Spirit, or the abiding of Christ in us is also the abiding of the Spirit.”<sup>10</sup>

Other passages, too, show evidence of the close connections among God

the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. According to both Paul and John (see Gal. 4:4–7; John 14:26; 15:26), the sending of the Spirit parallels the sending of the Son. And John attributes the sending the Spirit to both the Father and the Son.

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 community created by the Holy Spirit as the continuation of Christ’s mission to the world thus owes its existence to the salvific activity of the triune God.

### Salvation and the life of God

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 secondary or subordinate being.<sup>11</sup> 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 true, then there must be an intimate connection between God’s saving activity and God’s inner life. As Jesus declared to the disciples, “ ‘Whoever has seen me has seen the Father’ ” (John 14:9). 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.

The conviction that God’s revelation in Jesus Christ was a genuine *self-revelation* pervades recent discussions of the Trinity. Karl Rahner puts it this way: “the ‘economic’ trinity is the ‘immanent trinity,’ and the ‘immanent’ trinity is the ‘economic’ trinity.”<sup>12</sup> According to Karl

Barth, “God is amongst us in humility, our God, God for us, as that which He is in Himself, in the most inward depth of His Godhead. . . . In the condescension in which He gives Himself to us in Jesus Christ He exists and speaks and acts as the One He was from all eternity and will be to all eternity.”<sup>13</sup> For Eberhard Jüngel, the Incarnation is “not a second thing next to the eternal God but rather the event of the deity of God.”<sup>14</sup> For Wolfhart Pannenberg, God’s actions in salvation history reveal that God’s inner reality consists of “concrete life relations.”<sup>15</sup> And for Jürgen 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.”<sup>16</sup>

If the events of salvation’s 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 Trinity and the nature of the church

The conviction that the founding events of the church, the missions of the Son and the Spirit, are manifestations of God’s own life leads to dramatic insights into the nature of the church. 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.

The various statements about love in these documents seem to follow a “fugal” pattern. They keep moving among the following themes, connecting them 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.

# MINISTRY

*International Journal for Pastors*

## *Ministerial Student Writing Contest*

**Ministry, International Journal for Pastors, announces its second Ministerial Student Writing Contest. All students enrolled in a ministerial preparation program on the undergraduate or graduate level may participate.**

### **Submission requirements**

1. Writers must choose a category from the list below for their submission.
  - a. Biblical studies
  - b. Historical studies
  - c. Theological studies (including ethics)
  - d. Ministry (preaching, leadership, counseling, evangelism, etc.)
  - e. World missions
2. **All submissions must follow the Writer's Guidelines as to length, endnotes, style, and other features of the manuscript. Please carefully read the guidelines found at [www.ministrymagazine.org](http://www.ministrymagazine.org).**
3. Submit your manuscript in MS Word to [MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org](mailto:MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org). Please include the following information at the top of the manuscript: your name, address, email address, telephone number, category for which you are submitting (see above), religious affiliation, name of college/university/seminary you are attending, and title of your manuscript.
4. *Ministry* will accept only one submission per writer.

### **Prizes**

<b>GRAND PRIZE:</b> <b>\$750</b>	<b>FIRST PRIZE:</b> <b>\$500</b>	<b>SECOND PRIZE</b> (five possible): <b>\$400</b>	<b>THIRD PRIZE</b> (five possible): <b>\$300</b>
-------------------------------------	-------------------------------------	--	---

The evaluation panel will determine if all prizes will be awarded. The decisions of this panel are final.

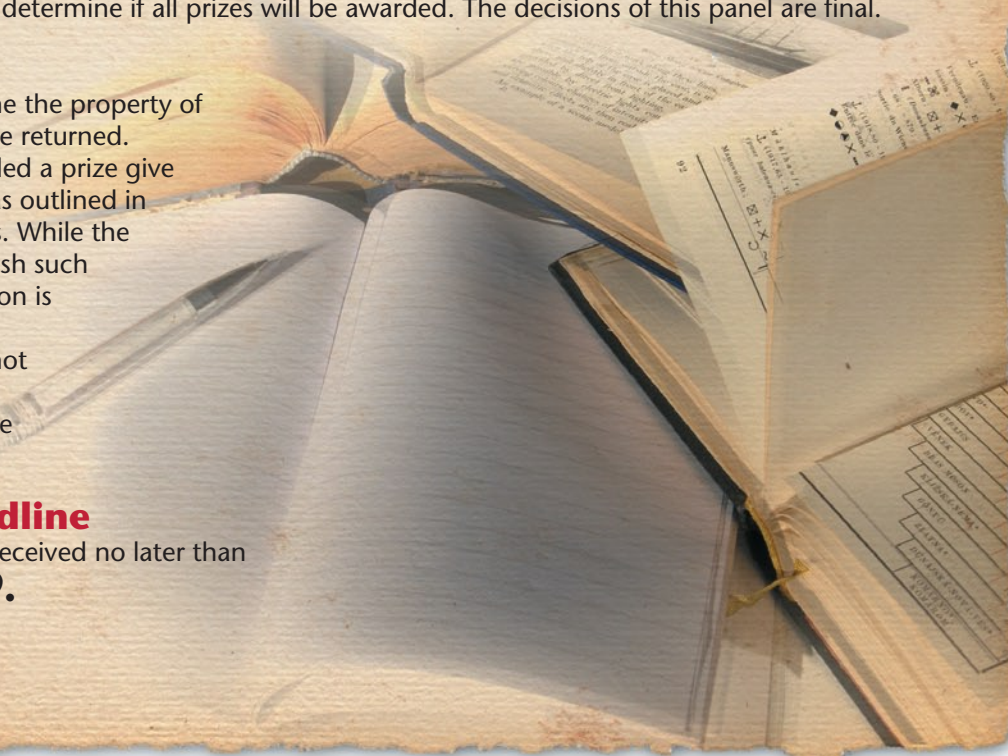
### **Publication**

1. All submissions become the property of *Ministry* and will not be returned.
2. Writers who are awarded a prize give the rights to *Ministry* as outlined in the Writer's Guidelines. While the editors intend to publish such manuscripts, publication is not guaranteed.
3. Manuscripts that are not awarded a prize may be purchased at a price to be negotiated.

### **Submission deadline**

All submissions must be received no later than

**JUNE 30, 2009.**



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 becomes 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. "All 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" (v. 14).

Second, it is not love per se, or just any sort of affection that identifies Jesus' followers but the specific love that Jesus has for them sets the standard for their love to one another. "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another" (John 13:34).<sup>17</sup> "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' " (15:12, 13). Jesus' followers should be prepared to love one another to the end, just as He "loved them to the end" (cf. 13:1).

Third, Jesus' love for the disciples expresses the Father's own love for them. "For the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God" (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, therefore, 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" (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" (v. 23).

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, "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" (17:21–23). First John 1:3 speaks of 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." Thus the divine love that creates Christian community 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, but its members actually share in that life. The love that flows between Father and



# SHARE THE HOPE

**Our desire is to reach as many people as possible in 2009.**

**1 Year • 1 Goal • 100,000 Souls**

**Every Pastor Hold a Spring and Fall Evangelistic Series.**

**[www.sharethehope2009.com](http://www.sharethehope2009.com)**

**Support for your Church**

- National website for meeting locations
- Advertising on media ministry programs
- Monthly interactive programs on the Hope Church Channel (and on the web)
- Free eNewsletter: Register at [sharethehope2009.com](http://sharethehope2009.com)
- Download a copy of "How to Conduct a Successful Evangelistic Series"
- Professional brochures available

**SHARE<sup>the</sup> HOPE**

**The 2009 Initiative of the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists.**

Son flows through the church. The idea that the church participates in God's life flows naturally from Jesus' parting words to His disciples. In the life and ministry of Jesus, and its continuation in the community He founded, we truly encounter "God with us."

For many who share this conviction, the essential link between Christian community and the life of God lies in the work of the Holy Spirit. For one thing, the Holy Spirit makes the church

the Son, the Son returns this love, and the Holy Spirit is the love itself between them. So, the Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son constitutes the unity of the divine being as that event which is love itself."<sup>20</sup>

Such descriptions of the relations within God suggest ways for us to envision the church's role in the divine life. Through the Spirit, as Stanley Grenz describes it, those who are "in Christ" come to share the eternal

makes God one, and the Holy Spirit makes us one with God."<sup>22</sup>

### **Practical implications of a trinitarian ecclesiology**

"So what?" questions are always important for theology, and in the case of the Trinity, they are more important than usual. To dismiss reflections on the Trinity as speculative intrusions into the nature of God is tempting, even though the church's earliest

## THE CHURCH IS A FELLOWSHIP CREATED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, A COMMUNITY THAT EXTENDS THE MISSION OF CHRIST IN THIS WORLD, DRAWING ITS MEMBERS INTO A CIRCLE OF LOVE BOTH CHARACTERISTIC OF AND CONSTITUTIVE OF GOD'S OWN LIFE.

a true community. As Robert Jenson says, "the church exists as a community and not as a mere collective of pious individuals," because the Spirit unites the Head with the body of Christ.<sup>18</sup>

Also, the Spirit gives the church its distinctive identity. Every community that is not just an aggregate has a "spirit" of some sort—we speak of "team spirit" and "school spirit," for example. But in the case of the church, this corporate spirit comes, not from the people who belong to it, but from the Spirit that creates it. To quote Jenson again, it is the church's "founding miracle" that her communal spirit is "identically the Spirit that the personal God is and has."<sup>19</sup>

As many interpreters see it, the Spirit's role in the church bears a close resemblance to the Spirit's role within the Trinity. The Spirit creates community within God's own life. As Jüngel describes it, "the Father loves

relationship that the Son enjoys with the Father. Because participants in this new community are co-heirs with Christ, the Father bestows on them what He eternally lavishes on the Son. And because they are "in Christ" by the Spirit, they participate in the Son's act of eternal response to the Father."<sup>21</sup>

To summarize, the church owes its existence to God's salvific activity and derives its essential character from God's own identity. Through the sending of the Son and the Spirit, God enters the world in order to create a community that reflects and extends the love that constitutes God's own reality. The central dynamic of Christian community thus corresponds to the essential dynamic of God's own life. And participating in the Christian community results in nothing less than a participation in God's own life. The Holy Spirit makes us one, the Holy Spirit

trinitarian thinkers anchored their understanding of God firmly in the history of salvation. What practical difference does a trinitarian ecclesiology make? Why is it so important to ground the church in God's own life?

First of all, trinitarian ecclesiology emphasizes the importance of the church to God. If God's acts in salvation history express God's true nature, then God has always been relational, from all eternity an everlasting community of love. This means that God creates out of love, He embraces the created world within the divine life, and from the moment of its existence, God made His relation to the world the center of His concern, not unlike the way parents place a beloved child at the center of their home. God values the world He loves so much that He even takes His identity from His relation to it. (God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,

the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.) Moreover, God's commitment to creation is permanent. He risks His own contentment—if not His own life—for its welfare. All this means that God places immense value on the church, and that aspect of creation attracts His particular attention. As Ellen White says, the church is the object of God's "supreme regard."<sup>23</sup>

If so, then salvation involves participating in the fellowship that defines God's own life, and one does this by participating in the community that God's love established. The experience of salvation is therefore social as well as individual, with a public as well as a private dimension. It changes our relations to others as well as to God. This exposes the fundamental inadequacy of all individualistic interpretations of Christian faith. Salvation is not merely, or even primarily, a matter between an individual and God. Salvation involves relationships with other people and seeks social, not merely personal transformation.

This also means that the purpose of the church should reflect and project the care and concern for others that God shows, that God is. To the extent that the church, the Christian community, embodies the love that radiates within the life of God, it provides the world the clearest manifestation of God's nature and character, and the clearest evidence of God's reality, evidence stronger than philosophical arguments could ever be.

If this is true, then the cultivation of true community, the development of caring relationships among people in the church, is the most important work of the church's ministry. Church growth is not merely, or even primarily, a matter of increasing size, but a matter of developing among the church's members relationships of mutual care and concern, encouraging the manifestation of qualities embodied in Jesus' life. As the members of the church exhibit these qualities, their display of Christ's character will naturally attract new participants.

These reflections also suggest that corporate worship is the central act

of the church's life. The gathering of the community to remember God's acts of self-giving love, to recommit its members to embody that love in all their relationships, continues as emblematic of the church's entire existence. It celebrates, crystallizes, realizes everything the church involves.

An appreciation for the trinitarian basis of Christian community thus helps us avoid inadequate and misleading concepts of the church. The church is not an organization preoccupied with expanding its membership and its budget. The church is not a collection of individuals who assent to the same set of beliefs. The church is not a group of people who gather to meet their emotional needs. The church is not a meeting of intellectuals who enjoy tossing around ideas. The church is not a multilevel marketing program, social club, recovery group, or academic seminar. The church is a fellowship created by the Holy Spirit, a community that extends the mission of Christ in this world, drawing its members into a circle of love both characteristic of and constitutive of God's own life. ■

1 To a certain extent, the growing interest in the Trinity among Adventists parallels a renewal of interest in the Trinity within Christian thought generally. In fact, the doctrine has attracted so much attention in recent decades that it looks to some less like a renaissance than a bandwagon. " 'Once threatened by its relative scarcity in modern theology, the doctrine of the Trinity now seems more likely to be obscured by an overabundance of theologians clustered around it.' " David S. Cunningham, *These Three Are One* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 19, quoted in *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 24. This is a striking contrast to the role that the Trinity played in liberal theology, which is to say, hardly any. Friedrich Schleiermacher postpones a discussion of the Trinity until the very last section of *The Christian Faith*. Although Paul Tillich employs a trinitarian motif in the central sections of his *Systematic Theology*—"Being and God," "Existence and the Christ," "Life and the Spirit"—and makes some interesting comments about its historical significance, volume 2 contains a short chapter on "The Trinitarian Symbols," the doctrine does not make a notable contribution to his theology.

2 In Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 2 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997–1999), 2:197.

3 "The two missions may be understood as interconnected moments of the one self-communication of God to the world." Karl Rahner, *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. Karl Rahner (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 1760.

4 All Scripture verses are from New Revised Standard Version.

5 Gerald F. Hawthorne, *The Presence and the Power: The Significance of the Holy Spirit in the Life and Ministry of Jesus* (Dallas, TX: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 54.

6 Hawthorne, 65.

7 Hawthorne, 133.

8 Hawthorne, 148.

9 Hawthorne, 183, 184.

10 Eduard Schweizer, "Pneuma, pneumatikos," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols., ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–1976), 6:433.

11 See Richard Rice, "Trinity, Temporality, and Open Theism," *Philosophia: Philosophical Quarterly of Israel*, special issue on "Models of God," 35:3, 4.

12 Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), 22.

13 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley and Thomas Torrance (T & T Clark, 1956), IV/1:193.

14 Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute Between Theism and Atheism*, trans. Darrell L. Guder (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 372.

15 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991–1998), 1:335, 323.

16 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, trans. Margaret Kohl (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1977), 54.

17 Compare Paul's exhortation: "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us" (Eph. 5:1, 2).

18 Jenson, 2:182.

19 Jenson, 2:181.

20 Jüngel, 374.

21 Grenz, 326.

22 Theologians sometimes debate the organization of the Apostle's Creed. Does it comprise three articles or four? Does belief in the "holy catholic church" elaborate or add to belief in the Holy Spirit? Our reflections suggest the former. The church is the creation of the Holy Spirit, and the creation of the church is the Spirit's most important work. To appreciate the importance of Christian community, we must recognize its basis within and its intimate connection to the dynamic reality of God's own life.

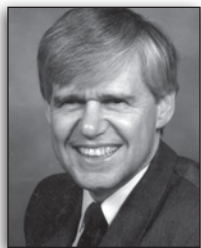
23 Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 12.

Tell us what you think about this article. Email us at [MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org](mailto:MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org) or write to us at 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904.

# Reading about the Trinity:

## A list for additional research

Rollin Shoemaker



Rollin Shoemaker, DMin, STM, is a pastor with the Southern New England Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, United States.

Bauckham, Richard. *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*. New Testament Theology. Edited by James D. G. Dunn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. Bauckham points out that Revelation has the same fundamental belief in the Trinity that led to the early development of the trinitarian doctrine. In fact, on page 164 he writes, "Revelation has the most developed trinitarian theology in the New Testament, with the possible exception of the Gospel of John, and is all the more valuable for demonstrating the development of trinitarianism quite independently of hellenistic philosophical categories." (See specifically pages 23–25 and 164.)

Bickersteth, Edward. *The Trinity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1971. Bickersteth writes in the preface "That the one Infinite God claims our supreme and undivided confidence; that the same confidence is, on the warrant of Scripture, to be reposed in the Father, and in the Son, and in the Holy Ghost; and that therefore Father, Son, and Spirit, are equally God over all, blessed for ever, the Triune Jehovah, in whose name alone we trust, on whose arm we rely, and whose majesty alone we adore and love" (7).

Calvin, John. "Institutes I." *The Library of Christian Classics*. Edited by John Baillie, John T. McNeill, and Henry P. van Dusen,

20. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967, 140–159. Calvin defines the Trinity to be the Father, the Son coming forth from the Father, the Holy Spirit coming forth from the Father and the Son (143). In §§ 16–20 Calvin writes about the distinction and unity of the Three Persons. In §§ 21–29 Calvin refutes antitrinitarian heresies.

Canale, Fernando L. "Doctrine of God." *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*. Edited by George W. Reid, 12. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000, 105–159. Canale comments directly on the Trinity in "Affirmation of the Biblical Trinity" (149, 150).

Dederen, Raoul. "Reflections on the Doctrine of the Trinity." *Andrews University Seminar Studies* 8 (1970). Dederen states that the doctrine of the Trinity lies at the root of theology and affects one's creed and practice. He discusses the doctrine of God and the biblical view of the Spirit. According to the author, there are clear trinitarian confessions in the New Testament. He then gives a brief history of discussions on the Trinity. The section on the relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit is helpful.

Erickson, Millard J. *Christian Theology*. 2d ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998. The author's goals in regard to the Trinity (346–367) are as follows: "1. To understand and explain the biblical teaching on the Trinity in three aspects: the oneness of God, the deity of three, and three-in-oneness. 2. To list and explain the historical constructions of the Trinity, such as the 'economic' view, dynamic monarchianism, modalistic monarchianism, and the orthodox view. 3. To describe the essential elements of the doctrine of the Trinity and explain why they are so vital to the Christian faith. [And] 4. To articulate the various analogies used in describing or clarifying the doctrine of the Trinity" (346). The author ends this chapter with an interesting comment: "Try to explain it, and you'll lose your mind;/But try to deny it, and you'll lose your soul" (367).

\_\_\_\_\_. *Making Sense of the Trinity: Three Crucial Questions*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000. The book is divided into three parts: (1) "Is the Doctrine of the Trinity Biblical?" (2) "Does the Doctrine of the Trinity Make

Sense?" and (3) "Does the Doctrine of the Trinity Make Any Difference?" The author states in his introduction, "The doctrine of the Trinity is a major distinguishing feature of Christianity which sets it apart from these other religions. On the one hand, it clearly distinguishes Christianity from the strongly monotheistic religions such as Judaism and Islam. On the other hand, it separates Christianity from polytheistic and pantheistic religions such as the Eastern religions" (14, 15). The author not only demonstrates the Trinity's biblical basis but he also demonstrates its relevance for the world of today.

Hall, Douglas John. *The Cross in Our Context: Jesus and the Suffering World*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003. Hall has a short section which he has entitled "The Trinitarian Presupposition of the Theology of the Cross" (83–88), in which he states, "If Jesus Christ is the Revealer of God and not merely a subordinate who, finally, submits to the will of his superior (The Father Almighty), then the cross must be understood to apply to God's own being and acting and not only to that of the Christ" (84).

Hatton, Max. *Understanding the Trinity*. Grantham: Autumn House, 2001.

Heick, Otto W. *A History of Christian Thought*. Vol. 1. 2 vols. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1973. Heick discusses the history and development of the doctrine of the Trinity in a section entitled "The Doctrine of the Trinity" (143–169). He notes that both the conservatives and progressives looked upon the doctrine of the Trinity as the "very foundation of the biblical history of redemption" (166).

Kelly, J. N. D. "The Doctrine of the Trinity." *Early Christian Doctrines*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1960, 252–279. In this chapter on "The Doctrine of the Trinity," Kelly

describes the history of the events surrounding the development of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Küng, Hans. *Christianity: Essence, History, and Future*. Translated by John Bowden. New York: Continuum, 1995. Küng (95–97; 297–305) states on page 95 under the title "No doctrine of the Trinity in the New Testament," "In short, in Judaism, indeed throughout the New Testament, while there is belief in God the Father, in Jesus the Son and in God's Holy Spirit, there is no doctrine of one God in three persons (modes of being), no doctrine of a 'triune God,' a 'Trinity.'" On page 305 he states, "In light of the New Testament, no more is required than that the relationship between Father, Son and Spirit should be interpreted in a critical and differentiated way for the present. The 'heart' of Christian faith is not a theological theory but belief that God the Father works in a revealing, redeeming and liberating way in us through his Son Jesus Christ in the Spirit. Any theological theory must not complicate this basic statement; rather, it must be seen simply as an instrument for clarifying it against differing cultural horizons."

Lewis, Alan E. "From God's Passion to God's Death." *Between Cross & Resurrection: A Theology of Holy Saturday*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001, 197–257. Lewis has divided the chapter into three parts ("I. The Trinity and the Passion of God," "II. The Trinity and Death in God," "III. The Trinity and the Death of God"). His central thesis "is that this promise ['one who loses life shall find it'], from the lips of Jesus, is a true statement about God. God is the one who knows how to die and knows that in accepting death there is life, and life only through accepting death. In the Father's surrender of the Son, and the Son's raising by the Spirit, God brings about this life-through-death, this resumption

beyond rupture, in self-fulfillment and for the sake of the world" (255). In my view, a very interesting and informative article to read.

Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines*. 2d ed. Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Association, 2005. The article on the Trinity (23–33) begins by stating the position of Seventh-day Adventists. It reads, "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." The chapter continues with the topics "Knowledge of God," (God can only be known by His self-revelation, which is primarily in Christ Jesus but also in the sacred writings of the Bible), "The Existence of God," (evidenced by creation and Scripture); "The God of the Scriptures," (Scriptures use of God's Names, God's Activities, and God's Attributes), "The Sovereignty of God," (the meaning of "Predestination and Human Freedom"), the "Dynamics Within the Godhead," (how the Godhead functions); and the "Focus on Salvation." The chapter also addresses the trinitarian statement of Matthew 28:19. The article notes, "Looking at the cross, we gaze into the heart of God" (32).

Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*. Translated by R. A. Wilson. New York: Harper & Row, 1974. Moltmann notes that it was the doctrine of the Trinity that marked Christianity off from polytheism, pantheism, and monotheism. Moltmann discusses the meaning of the Cross in light of the Trinity in the section entitled

"Trinitarian Theology of the Cross" (235–248). He states that "The place of the doctrine of the Trinity is not the 'thinking of thought', but the cross of Jesus. . . . The perception of the trinitarian concept of God is the cross of Jesus. . . . The theological concept for the perception of the crucified Christ is the doctrine of the Trinity. The material principle of the doctrine of the Trinity is the cross of Christ. The formal principle of knowledge of the cross is the doctrine of the Trinity" (240, 241). He also discusses "Trinity and Eschatology" (256–278).

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God: The Doctrine of God*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. London: SCM, 1983. The theology of the Cross undergirds all of Moltmann's understanding of the Trinity. He writes, "On the cross the Father and the Son are so deeply separated that their relationship breaks off. Jesus died 'without God'—godlessly. Yet on the cross the Father and the Son are at the same time so much one that they represent a single surrendering movement. 'He who has seen the Son has seen the Father.' The Epistle to the Hebrews expresses this by saying that Christ offered himself to God 'through the eternal Spirit' (*dia pneumatos aioniou*) ([Heb.] 9.14). The surrender through the Father and the offering of the Son take place 'through the Spirit.' The Holy Spirit is therefore the link in the separation. He is the link joining the bond between the Father and the Son, with their separation" (82). Moltmann also believes that the doctrines of the Trinity and Christology go together, and that they cannot be separated since God cannot be understood without Christ, and Christ cannot be understood apart from God.

Neuner, J., and J. Dupuis, eds. *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*. New York: Alba House, 1990. In chapter II entitled "The Triune God"

(103–124), the Trinity is discussed. The book's statement on the origin of the Trinity is "The Father is absolute origin, from Himself. . . the Son is born from the Father, from eternity. . . the Holy Spirit proceeds from Father and Son" (105).

Pfandl, Gerhard. *The Doctrine of the Trinity Among Adventists*. Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1999. Pfandl gives a brief outline of the development of the doctrine of the Trinity within Adventism. He notes that many Adventists up until the 1890s advocated an Arian or semi-Arian position. Pfandl cites the positions of various early Adventists who held these views. He then outlines Ellen G. White's view. The author notes the official statements on the trinitarian doctrine after 1900, as well as the struggle between the trinitarians and the antitrinitarians within the Adventist Church up to the publication date of this article.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Trinity in Scripture*. Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1999. Pfandl addresses the Old and New Testament witness in regard to the Trinity. He also looks at some difficult texts and shows how they support the trinitarian doctrine.

Rice, Richard. *The Reign of God: An Introduction to Christian Theology From a Seventh-day Adventist Perspective*. Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1985. His article on the Trinity (88–92) states that the Trinity represents the distinctively Christian understanding of God. He poses some frequently asked questions about the Trinity. He notes the genuine *self-revelation* of God is in Christ Jesus. He writes, "the doctrine of the trinity expresses the belief that the one God is present in Jesus through the Holy Spirit. . . . It is the belief that God is Father, Son, and Spirit in himself, as well as in our experience of him" (90). He tells us that there are only two trinitarian passages in the New Testament,



## Advance Your Career Prepare for Service Study in Germany

New programs  
taught in the English language:

**Master of Theological Studies (M.T.S.)** with concentrations in **Adventist Studies** or **Mission Studies**

**Master of Arts International Social Sciences (M.A.)**

**7 reasons to study at Friedensau:**

- Get to know Germany – right in the centre of Europe
- Make life-long friends with other international students
- Live on a beautiful campus, just an hour from Berlin, the capital
- Study with an internationally trained and highly qualified faculty
- Use the brand new library and its superior research facilities
- Discover the historic heartland of Protestantism
- Benefit from the university's low-price policy

ACA  
accredited



More information at  
[www.friedensau.eu](http://www.friedensau.eu)  
or write to  
[info@friedensau.eu](mailto:info@friedensau.eu)

Matthew 28:19 and 2 Corinthians 13:14. He mentions that there were some heretical views espoused. He then talks about how the Eastern and Western churches addressed the concept of the Trinity. Last of all, he talks about the terms used in trying to explain the Trinity. In the end, he writes, "The doctrine of the trinity is one of those areas where faith affirms what reason cannot totally comprehend" (92).

Strong, Augustus Hopkins. *Systematic Theology*. Vol. 1. 3 vols. Old Tappan: Fleming H. Revell, 1970. Chapter II, "Doctrine of the Trinity," is thoroughly done and demands knowledge of Greek from those who wish to study it. It covers pages 304–352. However, the book was written more than a century ago. But note: Systematic theologies usually have a section on the Trinity. The systematic theologies of the following authors could also be recommended: K. Barth, C. Hodge, N. Geisler, and W. Grudem.

Tillich, Paul. *Systematic Theology: Three Volumes in One*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967. In volume three, section IV (283–294), Tillich addresses the trinitarian issue under the title "The Trinitarian Symbols." The chapter is divided into three parts: "A. The Motives of the Trinitarian Symbolism," "B. The Trinitarian Dogma," and "C. Reopening the Trinitarian Problem." Under part A, Tillich writes, ". . . the trinitarian doctrine is the work of theological thought which uses philosophical concepts and follows the general rules of theological rationality. There is no such thing as trinitarian 'speculation.' . . . The substance of all trinitarian thought is given in revelatory experiences, and the form has the same rationality that all theology, as a work of the Logos, must have." Tillich concludes under part C with "The doctrine of the Trinity is not closed. It can be neither discarded nor accepted in its traditional form. It must be kept

open in order to fulfill its original function—to express in embracing symbols the self-manifestation of the Divine Life to man."

\_\_\_\_\_. *A History of Christian Thought*. New York: Harper & Row, 1968. Tillich notes Tertullian's and Irenaeus's views on the Trinity in the section entitled "Trinity and Christology" (46–48). He also reviews the historical development of the Trinity and the events that surrounded the development of the doctrine.

Toon, Peter, and James D. Spiceland, eds. *One God in Trinity: An Analysis of the Primary Dogma of Christianity*. London: Samuel Bagster, 1980. The purpose of the book "is to commend the orthodox doctrine as being more faithful to the biblical witness than either unitarianism or binitarianism" (xii). The origin of the book is from a conference held in Durham in 1978. The chapters originated for the most part from papers given at the conference. The book is composed of ten chapters, an introduction, and an epilogue. Chapter 1, "The Meaning of the Trinity," by Roger Nicole. Nicole defines the Trinity as "1) There is one God and one only. 2) This God exists eternally in three distinct persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. 3) These three are fully equal in every divine perfection. They possess alike the fullness of the divine essence" [1, 2]); Chapter 2, "The New Testament," by Bruce N. Kaye; Chapter 3, "The Discernment of Triunity," by Christopher B. Kaiser; Chapter 4, "The Patristic Dogma," by Gerald Lewis Bray; Chapter 5, "The *Filioque* Clause," by Alasdair Heron; Chapter 6, "Karl Barth," by Richard Roberts; Chapter 7, "Bernard Lonergan," by Hugo Meynell; Chapter 8, "Jürgen Moltmann," by Richard Bauckham; Chapter 9, "Process Theology," by James D. Spiceland; Chapter 10, "Recent British Theology," by Brian Hebblethwaite; and the introduction and epilogue by Peter Toon.

Whidden, Woodrow Wilson, Jerry Allen Moon, and John W. Reeve. *The Trinity: Understanding God's Love, His Plan of Salvation, and Christian Relationships*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2002. The book is divided into four sections: (1) "The Biblical Evidence for the Full Deity of Christ, the Personality of the Spirit, and the Unity and Oneness of the Godhead," (2) "The History of the Trinity Doctrine From A.D. 100 to A.D. 1500," (3) "Trinity and Anti-Trinitarianism From the Reformation to the Advent Movement," and (4) "The Doctrine of the Trinity and Its Implications for Christian Thought and Practice." There is a very interesting discussion on two key councils (Nicaea A.D. 325 and Constantinople A.D. 381) and their aftermath on pages 139–145, 150–155 respectively, and the role of Arius and others. The book lays out the issues and its relevance for today.

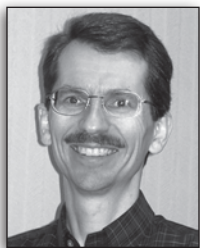
White, James R. *The Forgotten Trinity: Recovering the Heart of Christian Belief*. Grand Rapids, MI: Bethany House Publishers, 1998. The author makes a statement that he reiterates throughout his book: "God revealed this truth about himself most clearly, and most irrefutably, in the Incarnation itself, when Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, took on human flesh and walked among us. That one act revealed the Trinity to us in a way that no amount of verbal revelation could ever communicate" (14). The author defines the Trinity as "Within the one Being that is God, there exists eternally three coequal and coeternal persons, namely, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" (26). The book has many insightful footnotes. ■

Tell us what you think about this article. Email us at [MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org](mailto:MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org) or write to us at 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904.

# Improving the nominating committee process:

## Broadening our vision of volunteer support in the church

Curtis Rittenour



Curtis Rittenour, MDiv, is associate pastor, Spokane Valley Seventh-day Adventist Church, Spokane Valley, Washington, United States.

**S**eventh-day Adventist churches often find the nominating committee (NC) process challenging. To find volunteers for ministries seems more difficult, leaders are burning out, new ministries flounder, members are unaware of their spiritual gifts, and some do not serve at all. We could also mention the power struggles, the need for clear ministry descriptions, the lack of training, the importance of affirming volunteers, and the missing element of ongoing support.

Hence, we need a broader view of strategic volunteer support. Placing people in service consists of more than getting a “Yes!” from a member and handing them a key to a Sabbath School classroom. People need to be guided into the ministry that matches their God-given gifts and then supported in that ministry. The NC does not (and was not meant to) “do it all.”

Here are 25 tips to broaden and strengthen the work of the NC. Some of these ideas precede committee work, some happen within the committee, and some are critical follow-up steps to help sustain members in their ministries.

**Educate your board.** If you plan to make changes in how you do the NC, educate your board, get their support and make moderate changes. Modifying the NC seems to be a hot button for some members. Misunderstandings can easily happen. Lay out a clear plan and proposal.

**Train the NC.** We assume everyone knows how to “do” the NC. But why not go a step

further? Cast a vision with your committee that helps them see the importance of matching members’ gifts with ministries. Discuss the importance of confidentiality. Guide them through tips that will help them know how to invite people into ministry.

**Thank members for serving.** One of the simplest and overlooked parts of volunteer service in the church is affirmation. People want to make a difference but often feel overworked and under-thanked. There are many creative ways to thank members for serving. How about having the NC write personal Thank-You cards to all volunteers? Also, encourage all calls to serving members to begin with a sincere, “Thank you for serving.” You will be surprised at how many people will respond by saying, “No one has ever thanked me for serving in our congregation.”

**Review offices with the board.** Before the NC begins its work, go over all the current offices and positions with the church board to determine if there are any changes that need to be made (additions or deletions). There may be new ministries that need to begin. Perhaps some ministries have fulfilled their purpose and need to be retired.

**Consider a two-year term.** The *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* allows for a one- or two-year term for offices in the church. This can save a lot of NC work, especially in larger churches, and a two-year term allows ministry teams to grow. Not all ministries may fit a two-year term (such as school board positions). Some churches conduct a midterm evaluation to see if there are issues that need attention.

**Interview last year’s leaders.** How many times have you sat on a committee and heard people say, “I wonder what the needs are in that ministry?” or “I think—but I’m not sure—maybe that leader wants more help”? Instead of guessing, why not ask? Use a simple interview tool, determine who the ministry leaders are and interview them. Have NC members each contact one or two leaders and then report back at the next committee. Tell leaders, “We are not calling to ask you to serve—though that may happen. We are first collecting information so we know what the needs are in each ministry.”

**Work on leadership positions first.** If you are building a Sabbath School ministry team, first find the leader and then invite that leader to the NC to give input. These leaders will need to work with the people you suggest. Let them have a say. They are not voting members, but will probably have good ideas. If a leader suggests people who are not a good match, work with them on this.

**Identify equippers and doers.** Ephesians 4:11, 12 speak of some gifted people who “equip the saints for the work of ministry” (NRSV). Leaders in the church help to equip team members in ministry. Leaders think “we,” not “me.” These equippers are cheerleaders of their team and work to help each member successfully do their part. A “doer” tends to focus on their single area service on the team. We need doers, but equippers make better leaders.

With a doer placed as a leader, the ministry may suffer and die.

**Encourage gifts-based ministry.** Help the committee members to “match” members with ministry positions based on spiritual gifts. Print and hand out a list of spiritual gifts (and definitions) for the committee to use while searching for the right fit. Discourage “filling the slots” and “getting the job done,” which has less

to do with developing members and more to do with efficiency.

**Leave openings.** Is it better to fill every position even if the match is not good? It depends. There are ministries that would die or negatively impact the church if they were left open (for example, the church treasurer). But other ministries may not be crucial, especially if you placed the “wrong” person in that position. We’ve all heard stories of enthusiastic new members serving as elders. Not a good idea. Even the *Church Manual* discourages this. If a ministry needs someone, but a match cannot be made, ask a seasoned member to carry this ministry until someone else can be found and trained.

**Advertise ministry openings.** Create a place on your bulletin board (or put up a table in your foyer) and call it, “The Service Center.” Advertise ministry openings with clear job descriptions. Interested members are then interviewed and placed by someone

from the NC. One extra tip: do not advertise leadership positions. They are “by invitation only” jobs. You might find a willing person who is a poor match to lead a ministry. Rather, advertise assistant positions.

**Invite people to prayerfully consider a position.** When a NC member calls to talk with someone, ask them if this is a good time to talk. After presenting the position, say, “We

a comfortable atmosphere for members and guests to fellowship in after services?” The essence of each ministry helps communicate to members that every job builds up the body of Christ.

**Analyze “No” responses.** When a NC member calls and invites someone to prayerfully consider serving in a ministry and they receive a “No” answer, don’t drop it. Think about what this “No” means. For instance, “No” could mean:

“Not now, this is bad timing.” (Then ask, “When do you think would be a better time?”) Or, “No, I don’t feel qualified.” (Then ask, “If training was provided, would that make a difference?”) Or, “No, I’m not interested.” (Then ask, “What ministry area would interest you?”)

**Deal with poor matches.** What if you have members with long tenures in positions that don’t really match their

gifts? Try exploring their gifts and telling them, “We are not maximizing your gifts in this position. Your gifts would better be used in this other position.” Also, remember that a poor match is different from a poor attitude (or other issue).

**Use a database to track gifts.** Most church database programs allow you to create custom fields. Use this feature to track the spiritual gifts of your members, especially after conducting a gifts seminar. This database can be invaluable to your NC.

**Clear children’s workers.** Every adult that works with children should be cleared in order to avoid problems with convicted sex offenders, for instance. For example, the Upper Columbia Conference provides volunteer service information forms that must be filled out by anyone working with children ages 0–18. Check with your conference for similar forms. A shorter form is used for annual updates.

ONE OF THE SIMPLEST AND  
OVERLOOKED PARTS OF  
VOLUNTEER SERVICE IN THE  
CHURCH IS AFFIRMATION. PEOPLE  
WANT TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE,  
BUT OFTEN FEEL OVERWORKED  
AND UNDERTHANKED.

would like you to prayerfully consider this position. You can call me back after you’ve prayed about it.” Demonstrate to your members that they are considering spiritual ministry.

**Use ministry descriptions.** We call them “ministry” vs. “job” descriptions in order to help members know they are truly “ministers” in the body of Christ. You can find many samples of these. The North American Division, for example, has created a set called “Responsibilities in the Local Church” (available through [www.adventsource.org](http://www.adventsource.org)). Determine if the church organization in your area has such resources. If you hand these to a potential volunteer, you might say, “This is a broad description to give you an idea about this ministry. We don’t expect you to follow every detail.”

**Help people see the essence of each ministry.** What statement would attract you more to a ministry position? “Would you wash tables after potluck?” or “Would you help provide

**Ask everyone in the church to serve.** Every part of the body of Christ is important. Don't overlook inviting all members to serve somewhere. When you finish your work, review all the active members and divide their names and interview them for service. Use an "Inviting People Into Ministry" interview form. You may expect some "No" responses, but you will still communicate to these members that "we need you."

**Provide several avenues to service.** The NC is one way to invite people into ministry. But it can be a limited way (for instance, meets once a year, doesn't teach people about gifts). A gifts class can be another avenue for people into ministry. Also, for some positions, a leader's initiative in finding people to serve can be valuable. Make sure you have a system for clearing these volunteers.

**Discourage silos.** Most of us have seen silos—tall round structures used by farmers to store silage for winter feeding. Some members function in silos. They


are serving apart from the body, not connected to the vision. Encourage every ministry leader to consider how their work is a part of the larger body.

**Broaden support.** Ongoing help will strengthen your volunteers. Consider providing training (seminars, materials, on-the-job, periodicals, etc.), affirmation (words of appreciation), feedback (both encouraging and guiding), and evaluation (a 30-minute annual meeting to review their ministry).

**Teach and preach about spiritual gifts.** If you suddenly expect all your members to be clear about gifts during the NC process, you will be disappointed. Preach about Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4. Provide a spiritual gifts class at least once a year to help members understand how God has gifted them. Use resources like Connections (available through [www.creativeministry.org](http://www.creativeministry.org)).

**One plus two.** Here's a short vision statement to encourage everyone to serve in the church. Tell your members,

"Here is the minimum involvement we hope for from every member. ONE stands for everyone attending our weekly worship services. TWO represents two more ways to be involved. One way is to be in a ministry that FEEDS you (like a small group). The other way is to be in a ministry where you SERVE. Everyone needs to serve somewhere. It may be only one hour a week (minimally) or four to five hours a week (heavier responsibilities)."

**Pray for the leading of the Holy Spirit.** The Holy Spirit is the Giver of all good gifts. Pray before every NC for the Spirit to lead and guide in selecting members for positions. We want the right people, in the right places, for the right reasons, at the right time! 

\* *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 17th ed. (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005), 49, 153.

*Tell us what you think about this article. Email us at [MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org](mailto:MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org) or write to us at 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904.*



*Nonprofit Leadership*  
**Certification Program**

*Nonprofit Management  
Community Outreach*

**Burleson Seventh-day Adventist Church**  
601 So. Burleson Blvd.  
Burleson, Texas 76028

**Make the World a  
Better Place to Live!**

**Level I  
Basic Curriculum May 3-7, 2009**  
**Level II  
Advanced Curriculum October 11 - 15, 2009**

Register Now! Visit [www.plusline.org](http://www.plusline.org) or call 1-800-732-7587

Presented by North American Division Adventist Community Services, Columbia Union College, Andrews University, Adventist Risk Management, GC Sabbath School/Personal Ministries, Adventist World Radio, Philanthropic Service for Institutions, Southwestern Union & Texas Conference.



# FRONTLINE: Mental Health

Resources for Congregations and Clergy

**April 27-28, 2009**

Bethesda Pooks Hill Marriot • Bethesda, Maryland

In a comfortable and professional setting, behavioral health specialists, experts in mental health, and faith community leaders will come together for an intensive exploration of the issues surrounding the mental health of congregations.

- ◆ You can register online at [www.plusline.org](http://www.plusline.org) or by calling Plusline at 1-800-732-7487.
- ◆ Registration will be accepted through April 22, 2009.

## BOOK REVIEW

### **Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream, 2nd ed.,**

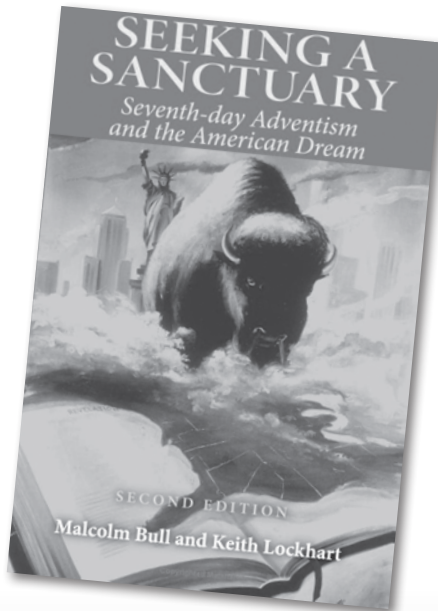
by Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006.

As a relatively new pastor, I have wondered how people in the community I serve view Seventh-day Adventists. Of course, as Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart maintain in *Seeking a Sanctuary*, most people have not heard of Adventism. Those who have most likely have either had a negative encounter with a church member, or they have been positively impacted through one of our Adventist institutions. *Seeking a Sanctuary* will challenge Adventist ministers to better understand how those outside of our religious community view our denomination and thereby become more sensitive to our public persona.

The first part of the book focuses on Adventist theology. Bull and Lockhart maintain that Adventists are not a part of the general mainstream because of their belief that America will someday become intolerant. The authors continue their argument that "There is very little . . . to support the widely held contention that Adventists have moved from the margins of society toward the mainstream" (108). Instead, they suggest that Adventist theology has developed in parallel with that of the mainstream.

In part two (113–255), Bull and Lockhart describe the Adventist experience and the American dream. Chapter 7 describes Adventism as "an alternative social system that can meet the needs of its members from the cradle to the grave" (114). Chapter 8 showcases patterns of growth. From

their perspective, the authors probe why Adventism in North America (since 1955) has entered "a long period of decline relative to the rest of the world" (143). (One must wonder if



*SEEKING A SANCTUARY*  
WILL CHALLENGE  
ADVENTIST MINISTERS TO  
BETTER UNDERSTAND HOW  
THOSE OUTSIDE OF OUR  
RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY  
VIEW OUR DENOMINATION  
AND THEREBY BECOME  
MORE SENSITIVE TO OUR  
PUBLIC PERSONA.

this is actually a period of decline, or simply the expansion of Adventist missions?) The authors state that although Seventh-day Adventism has become the twenty-seventh largest denomination in the United States, it has not, however, "developed the demographic profile of

one of America's mainstream churches" (145). Adventists appear to be best at recruiting outsiders and, over two to three generations in their alternative system, deposit them on a higher socio-economic status. Adventists live longer than the general population (chapter 9 is about the "science of happiness"), advocate religious liberty (chapter 10), and appear to be prone to schism (chapter 11). Ultimately, Adventism reproduces "a parallel version of American society" that becomes a "separate organism within the larger body" (247, 248).

The third part, the "Adventist subculture" (259–347), has helpful chapters on gender, race, ministry, medicine, education, and the self-supporting movement. Readers of *Ministry* will find chapter 16, dealing with ministry, particularly poignant. The authors contend that Adventist churches have a higher level of conflict, yet the personal bias of the authors, as former Adventists, comes through in instances like this. However, my experience with other congregations in our community is that many congregations from other denominations are far more conflicted than our church.

Significantly, of the major groups from the nineteenth century, Bull and Lockhart argue that Adventism is the only one to develop a professional clergy (292). As such, a great deal is expected of Adventist ministers. Unfortunately, research shows that ambivalence exists in the role of a pastor.

I recommend to clergy that they read *Seeking a Sanctuary*. In all probability, you won't agree with all of the candid and sometimes even critical analysis, but you will be more attuned to the sociological trends that drive Seventh-day Adventism. ■

—Reviewed by Michael W. Campbell, PhD,  
pastor of the Montrose Seventh-day Adventist  
Church, Montrose, Colorado, United States.

# Reconnect, reclaim, reflate

JAMES A. CRESS



**A**s we launch this year of evangelism, we must confront the reality that many who once worshiped with us, now, for a variety of reasons, no longer fellowship with our church, or any other denomination. While we emphasize reaching the lost—sometimes termed our “unsaved loved ones”—we ought to remember the needs of former, missing, or inactive members—our “unloved saved ones”!

Of course, free choice mandates that each individual's right not to worship must be respected, but many of these individuals do not participate in worship or other church activities because they have been hurt, disappointed, or disillusioned at some point along the way. In many cases, we have been the cause of fellow believers leaving active fellowship by our coldness or indifference to their needs.

**Why they leave.** While doctrinal differences, heretical breakaway groups, or disagreements over worship styles and standards have caused some people to leave, others depart due to boredom, poor preaching, and inadequately planned services. However, the vast majority leave due simply to a lack of friendship. They have been wounded in the church. Whatever the cause for their absence, two things are certain. The back door still swings and solutions lie far more within our power as active members than we might wish to think.

In North America alone, nearly 300,000 members officially have been removed (and not because of death) from our membership in the past 20 years. That total equals 40 percent of our total membership at the beginning of these two decades—a tragedy of greatest proportions, especially when we have not maintained even basic information like a mail or telephone contact. This equals a total loss similar to that of the ten largest conferences in the division simply disappearing.

These numbers, tragic as they are, reveal only part of the story. Also, thousands of individuals are still on the membership rolls who never worship with other believers—only about 50 percent of all members actually attend weekly worship services. Granted, many are ill, elderly, or traveling. This still leaves a vast potential audience of individuals whom God loves and for whom His church ought to feel passion to love back into fellowship.

The great evangelist, Fordyce Detamore, used to emphasize the *reachability* of former members as his “best potentials” for bringing them to a new relationship with Jesus. So if we want to add 100,000 active members to our churches during this year, we might well start by reaching our “unloved saved ones” with renewed hope in the soon return of Jesus.

While we recognize that some who have left our fellowship would choose not to return, many have left because of interpersonal difficulties—loneliness, alienation, boredom, lack of spiritual food, criticism, rejection, etc. Thousands are waiting on the verge of the kingdom to be invited back. Among these, we can make a difference as we allow the Spirit to work in our lives. We can, and must, actively search for them, listen to them, and hopefully reclaim them into a vital relationship with Christ and His church.

**You know who we need!** One of the first steps in reclaiming those who were once part of our fellowship is to identify their names and mailing addresses so we can contact them. Your

help is needed! Your congregants know the very ones we need. While we have the names and addresses of some of those who should be contacted, many names and addresses are unknown to the church office, even though they are individuals whom your members know personally. Never assume that the church has accurate or up-to-date information. If you know someone who should receive a gracious contact along with a no-pressure invitation to resume fellowship, please let us know.

In our last pastorate, Sharon and I intentionally concentrated on reclaiming our former and inactive members, as well as establishing contact with those we could not have known, such as those who had moved to our area without initiating involvement with the church. We mailed a request to every church in our conference and to every conference in North America requesting help in identifying individuals in our metropolitan area who no longer participated in church activities. In just a few weeks, we received the names of over 200 such individuals to whom we prioritized low-key, encouraging spiritual nurture. We focused our energies and resources toward those whose lives were once united in fellowship with the Adventist Church, and within a short time, we experienced more than four dozen individuals who had returned to our church.

**God loves the missing!** One of the clearest lessons Jesus ever taught was our heavenly Father's concern for those missing from the fellowship of believers. Luke 15 records three different stories that demonstrate this point—the missing sheep, the missing coin, and the missing son. Interestingly, each story tells a different path by which someone ends up among the missing, often without even realizing their situation. The sheep wandered off alone. The coin never left the premises but remained separated. The prodigal son deliberately chose to

leave in rebellion and ended up alone.

While we diligently search for missing and former members and collect names and accurate addresses, remember that some, much like the story of the coin, might remain in our midst, yet alone. If you think of someone like this whom you know, why not give them a telephone call right now, and let them know they are missed. Never underestimate how much influence your personal contact might have.

And in my congregation's weekly newsletter that we targeted to hundreds of readers beyond our active membership, I wrote the following, *"If you are reading this and feel all alone, please know that our intent is stronger than our follow-through in too many cases. This is your personal invitation. We want you back to a far greater extent than we are capable of expressing. God's love for you is even greater than our concern. Please don't wait for someone to call you! Give us a call! Better yet, come rejoice with us in renewed fellowship!"* The very next Sabbath, a family showed up at church and stated, "We understand you're looking for us—we have not attended church in over twenty years."

**How to reclaim?** Nine principles for reclaiming those who are missing from fellowship are outlined in Luke 15:

**Count.** The good shepherd knew that one sheep was missing because he kept careful count on those who were with him. Direct your elders to work with you in spiritually nurturing every member.

**Risk.** The shepherd left the 99 sheep exposed to danger in the wild places as he went searching for the one who was missing. He risked the group's security and convenience for the one most in need! Prioritize.

**Labor.** When the homemaker discovered her coin was missing, she worked long and diligently. Nothing of value comes easily! This parable also expresses God's intention for all members to be represented in ministry. Jesus framed the Divine Sweeper as a woman.

**Wait.** Never give up! The prodigal's father had to patiently wait until his son

made the choice to start back toward home. Then he ran out to greet his prodigal. God will meet any returning soul more than half way.

**Pray.** You need not wait in idleness. Prayer is the key in the hand of faith that unlocks heaven's storehouse of blessings! When I pray for missing members, I do not pray to change God's attitude toward the lost; God changes my attitude toward the lost.

**Love unconditionally.** Never impose criteria on someone else in order for them to become recipients of your love. Express your love unreservedly! Accept them even as they stink from the pigpen; then love them into life-changing sanctified living.

**Welcome.** Joyously express your pleasure when a missing friend returns to fellowship. Make them feel wanted and welcomed! Encourage even their very first steps toward heaven. The prodigal received shoes, a ring, and a robe from his father at the moment of return.

**Restore.** Those who return have nothing to prove. The prodigal expected to be a servant; he was restored as an heir! The lost have nothing to prove to the church. We must prove our love and concern to those who have been wounded.

**Celebrate.** Make every restoration a joyous occasion. All heaven rejoices when one individual returns. We could at least host a fellowship luncheon! What better occasion to party?

**Prioritizing reclamation.** Mike Jones, who possesses the unique capability of thinking like a successful pastor, which he once was, and responding like a reclaimed inactive member, which he experienced for himself, states, "If the church wants to maximize its results for the Year of Evangelism, I make three suggestions. (1) Local congregations should make themselves more user-friendly, (2) evangelistic emphasis should include printing small, low-budget newspaper ads that intentionally invite inactive and former members to visit, (3) and pastors and elders should lead in planning an annual Homecoming Sabbath for those who have become inactive and missing."



Mike's sermon, "Enduring to the End," calculated to retain current members while encouraging the discouraged and disenchanted to return, can be viewed online at [www.ministerialassociation.com](http://www.ministerialassociation.com) and Paul Richardson's Center for Creative Ministry presents excellent Homecoming Sabbath resources at [www.creativeministry.org](http://www.creativeministry.org).

**What's next?** Now that we've seen the potential to reconnect/reclaim/reflame inactive and former members, we must "put shoes on the process" and make a concentrated effort to reconnect relationships, reclaim fellowship, and reflame discipleship. I recommend the following process:

1. Appoint a central site for a master list of inactive and former members (The Voice of Prophecy for North America). Other divisions can institute and develop a similar plan for their territory.
2. Publish the following announcement in every church bulletin and newsletter for six consecutive weeks:  
**Searching for former and inactive Adventists.** *Do you have a friend or relative who used to be a member or active in church activities? We need their name, mailing address, email contact, and telephone. Each person will receive an attractively designed, sensitively written packet of materials inviting them to re-establish contact with the nearest Adventist church. Send all information to: Attention: Pastor Fred Kinsey, The Voice of Prophecy, Box 53055, Los Angeles, CA 90053 ([www.vop.com/reflame](http://www.vop.com/reflame)).*
3. Pray for the Holy Spirit to warm the heart of every individual who will receive a gracious invitation to attend worship services and to reconnect with the church of their heritage.
4. Print the display advertisement on the following page in the "Weekend/Entertainment" section of Friday newspapers for eight consecutive weeks. For a version that you can adapt, visit [www.ministerialassociation.com](http://www.ministerialassociation.com) and click on the Reflame Logo.
5. Conduct a "Love Them Back" seminar for every church in which pastors will instruct members on how best to encourage and engage with those who

## Seventh-day Adventists

Friends  
Family  
Former Members  
Disenfranchised  
Discouraged  
Searching

**You're  
welcome!**



**Your Seventh-day Adventist Church Name**

Your street address  
Your city, state, postal code  
Your directions

**Sabbath School time**

**Worship time**

**Your special event information  
and additional details.**


will return to attendance. Mike Jones recommends that this seminar include the following practical methods:

- Make eye contact with each visitor to your church.
- Add a welcome smile to your eye contact.
- Touch your visitors with warmth and welcome. A handshake or squeeze on the shoulder gives positive impact.
- Ask questions designed to open conversation. "Do you folk live around here?" (Never ask if they are "visiting," which might easily offend someone who attends regularly and believes you should already know them.)
- Listen to your visitors. Open-

ended questions are better. "How did you come to be in this city?" or "How do you feel about our worship services?" Once you've asked, listen. Suture your mouth shut and you will learn much from what they share.

- Talk to your visitors. Easy conversations such as, "Good morning, my name is Jim" will get the job done. At first, strive for a friendly relationship and nothing more.
- Defer investigating their motive for attending or their challenges of the past. Over a period of time, they may share how they have felt wounded or became disenfranchised from the church.
- Feed your visitors. Food and

fellowship is a powerful social component and Adventists, at their best, do this very well.

- Simplify your own life to take time to greet at least one or two individuals you don't know every Sabbath. These connections make high impact.
- Restrain those who reject such training from imposing their antisocial attitudes, speculative ideas, or fanciful heresies on those who visit your church.
- Follow Jesus' model—the only way to reach the heart and mind of seekers. "Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me' " (*Ministry of Healing*, 143).
- Ask the Holy Spirit to enable you to be a loving and loveable Christian who will appropriately interact with all whom God will help us reclaim. 

*Tell us what you think about this editorial. Email us at [MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org](mailto:MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org) or write to us at 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904.*

## Dateline



### Seven ways to make your week great

**Kennington, England**—From small beginnings on a deprived housing estate in 2001, the Kennington Community Fellowship (KCF), based opposite the Oval Cricket ground in London, took a new step last autumn to expand its community outreach.


Under the heading of "Seven Ways to Make Your Week Great," four new ministries have been launched as the local church seeks to encourage local community participation in its quest to reinstate church as the hub of the community. Adding to the already successful

Community Health and Enterprise days, Mondays now see Spanish classes taught by **Angela Lake**, alongside an arts and crafts class taught by **Cecilyn Williams**. Urban Youth Ministry takes precedence on Tuesdays. "Food 4 da Brain" and a basketball ministry attract an average of 25 unchurched members of the community. Wednesdays see vibrant "connect groups" of prayer and Bible study, while on Thursdays **Jermaine Wong** leads an exciting drama class.

Why is KCF now running seven days a week? **Seyi**, who runs the basketball on Tuesdays responds, "We have created a nice environment for the young boys of the community to come into. We

pray together at the beginning, we pray together at the end." **Kobe**, one of our unchurched participants will tell you, "I look forward to coming every week." He says, "Here are my friends; here is my community."

That is exactly the reaction that pleases their pastor, **Paul King-Brown**. He says, "The intention and endeavor of KCF is to be an active and effective influence for Jesus Christ within our community." That seems to be happening, he says, as members are "recognizing that we are His hands and His feet."

For more information on KCF, visit their Web site: [www.kenningtonlife.com](http://www.kenningtonlife.com) or phone 07810560495. [BUC News] 

Hamblin's Outreach Publishing Enterprises

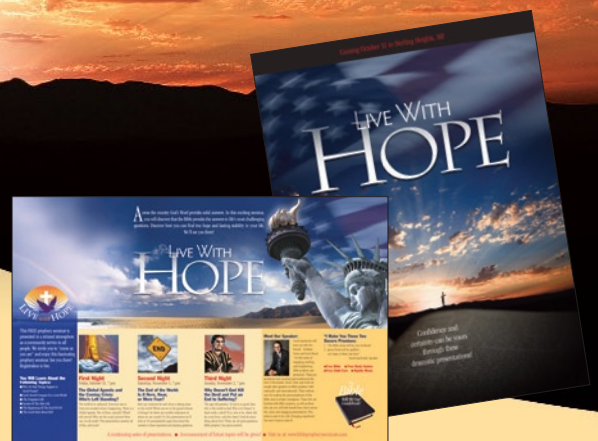
# Help Make it Happen



## Reach the Goal with HOPE's™ Coordinated Group of Handbills and Supplies

2009 has been designated *The Year of Evangelism* by the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists. To meet the goal of 100,000 new baptisms during this year, church leaders are encouraged to organize effective outreach activities and hold at least two evangelistic series.

HOPE™ has designed special handbills and supplies to help make your contribution to the *Live with Hope* initiative easy and effective. To get your congregation started, visit our website or call our toll-free number and order your complimentary HOPE™ 2009 Evangelistic Resource Planning Calendar today!



**Call: 1-800-274-0016 or email: [hope@hopesource.com](mailto:hope@hopesource.com) • [www.hopesource.com](http://www.hopesource.com)**  
Providing Handbills & Supplies for Evangelism, Health & Bible Prophecy Seminars  
P.O. Box 350 • Tecumseh, Michigan 49286

# EVANGELISTIC ADVERTISING



# MADE EASY!

WWW.ADVENTISTEVANGELISM.COM

**ColorPress**  
P U B L I S H I N G

800.222.2145  
www.adventistevangelism.com

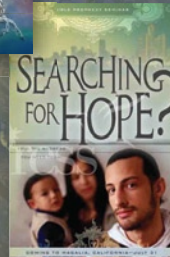
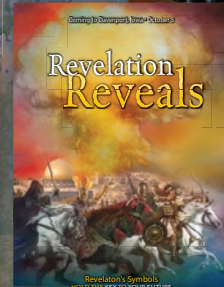
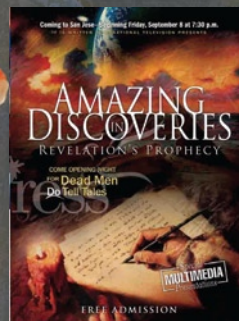


GENERAL CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS®

**MINISTRY®**

1350 N. KINGS ROAD • NAMPA, ID 83687-3193

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED



## The Full Circle of Evangelism

Evangelism begins well before opening night, and continues long after the doors are closed. That's why Color Press has developed a **full range of products to assist the evangelistic spirit.**

Color Press offers you **top-flight designers and a beautiful and contemporary image library.**

Color Press also offers you exclusive access to the stunning artwork of **Nathan Greene** and **Lars Justinen.**

- Bible Study Invitation Cards
- Bible Study Lessons
- Banners
- Posters
- Decision Cards
- Registration Tickets
- Prayer Cards
- Backdrops
- Nightly Flyers
- Handbills



Nonprofit Organization  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Nampa, ID  
Permit No. 147