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**THE CONCEPT OF GOD AMONG ADVENTIST ELEMENTARY AND
SECONDARY STUDENTS: FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS**

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I. INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM AND IT'S DELIMITATIONS

In our survey, which concerns children from 4 to 15 years of age, we have tried to understand how they perceive God through their religious education in the context of the adventist family, school and church. This study is designed to discover how our children integrate their concept of God in their general religious worldview and in their vision of life. This determines their values, helping them to interpret the world around them, stipulating to them how the world ought to be and advising them how to conduct themselves in the world¹. We are aware that their image of God is not the only component of their religious experience, but it is a constituent part of it.

We conducted our research about the genesis of the idea of God in the lifespan between early childhood and adolescence, and to clarify our conceptual and methodological framework, we took the Piagetian Stages from the Theory of Cognitive and Moral development², which envisions the successive developmental periods of intelligence, each characterized by a relatively stable general structure that incorporate developmentally earlier structures in a higher synthesis. The age range designated for each of Piaget's six stages in cognitive development is meant to be only approximate: individual infants might therefore pass through any of the stages more rapidly or more slowly than these crude age norms would suggest. The sequence of stages, however, is believed to be absolutely constant or invariant for children the world over. We did not deal with the first stage, sensori-motor(0-2 years), because it is too early to get significant answers, but we payed attention to the other stages, which are mentioned in our survey according to the representation of God by our children.

The main purpose of our study is to ascertain the existence of a great variety of aspects in the religious life of our children, and we emphasize some differences occurring in the perception of God for the children during their chronological development (genetical and dynamic perspective) and also some basic differences along their gender development (comparative and differential perspective between girls and boys).

Concerning our method, a questionnaire containing three questions was given to children in Adventists schools and churches of the french-speaking area in Europe between 1982 and 1993: in France, the schools of Collonges-sous-Salève (Haute-Savoie) and of Valence (Drôme), including various churches (Paris, Marseille, Strasbourg, Bordeaux, Lyon, Annemasse, Saint-Claude, Thonon, Saint-Julien en Genevois); in Switzerland, various churches like Geneva, Gland, Lausanne and Renens.

Three hundred and nine children answered our questions in a written form: 1) Who is God (His person); 2) What does God do? (His action); 3) Where is God? (His localization). We rejected eighteen answers, because they were directly or indirectly

influenced by another child or an adult, or because they did not mention the age or the gender of the person. We conducted approximately about twenty personal or collective oral interviews, in order to have an objective control of the answers, and we noticed no significant difference. We have the following overview of the data (291 answers kept), regrouped according to the piagetian stages and differentiating between girls (g) and boys (b):

1) the Pre-operational Stage (2-7 years): We received 42 answers, in the following categories:

-for the girls the total (t) is 19 answers, distributed as follows: 3 answers from 4 years, 2 from 5 years and 2 from 5 and 1/2 years; 5 from 6 years; 6 from 7 years and 1 from 7 and 1/2 years;

-for the boys, t=23 answers: 1 from 3 and 1/2 years; 1 from 4 years; 3 from 5 years; 3 from 6 years; 13 from 7 years and 2 from 7 and 1/2 years.

2) the Concrete Operations Stage (7-11 years): We had 177 answers:

-for the girls, t=90: 14 from 8 years and 2 from 8 and 1/2 years; 14 from 9 years and 4 from 9 and 1/2 years; 25 from 10 years and 2 from 10 and 1/2 years; 25 from 11 years and 4 from 11 and 1/2 years;

-for the boys, t=87: 13 from 8 years and 1 from 8 and 1/2 years; 24 from 9 years and 5 from 9 and 1/2 years; 20 from 10 years and 2 from 10 and 1/2 years; 15 from 11 years and 7 from 11 and 1/2 years.

3) the Formal Operations Stage (11-15 years): We received 72 answers:

-for the girls, t=42: 17 from 12 years and 1 from 12 and 1/2 years; 15 from 13 years and 2 from 13 and 1/2 years; 4 from 14 years; 2 from 15 years and 1 from 15 and 1/2 years;

-for the boys, t=30: 9 from 12 years and 2 from 12 and 1/2 years; 9 from 13 years and 1 from 13 and 1/2 years; 4 from 14 years; 2 from 15 years and 3 from 15 and 1/2 years.

We will now expand our statistical report with a more pertinent presentation of our children's comprehension of God, parallel to the stages of cognitive and moral development as they occur in children: pre-operational stage (2-7 years), concrete operations (7-11 years), and formal operations (11-15 years).

This study is directed towards the cognitive and affective aspect of God's perception and representation, under the general framework of equilibration: the process of regulating assimilation and accommodation in order to maintain a state of internal balance or equilibrium. Assimilation is the process of taking from the environment all forms of stimulation and information, which are then digested and reintegrated into the organism's existing forms and structures; Accommodation is the process of reaching out and adjusting to conditions in the environment, so that preexisting patterns of behaviour are modified to cope with new information or situations.

II. THE CONCEPT OF GOD AMONG CHILDREN BETWEEN TWO AND SEVEN

The pre-operational stage (2-7 years) is divided into two phases: 1) the preconceptual phase (2-4 years), and 2) the intuitive phase (4-7 years). In the preconceptual phase the child may recognize a triangle, a square and a trapezoid, but to put them all together under the concept "geometric forms" is beyond the capacity of preconceptual thought. The child achieves the capacity to form mental symbols which stand for or represent absent things, events or persons, and these mental symbols are the representational intelligence. Imitations become less overt and are increasingly internalized.

The intuitive phase is also perceptual because the child is feeling his way toward logical thinking while being constantly deceived by the perceptual appearance of things. There is not yet the notion of conservation or the ability to realize that certain attributes of an object are constant, even if it changes in appearance.

A characteristic of the preoperational child is his egocentrism: the world is as he sees it, and he is unable to put himself in another's position. Another characteristic of egocentric thought is known as animism: the child believes that the world of nature is alive, conscious, and endowed with purpose, like himself: "*When it rains, God is crying because I was unkind*". Artificialism, the tendency to believe that human beings create natural phenomena, is also a specific characteristic of that age: daddy is responsible for the clouds in the sky because he smokes his pipe. The last characteristic of the stage is phenomenalism, the belief that there is a causal relationship between two things or events because they occur together: when the child is naughty and there is a thunderbolt, he would say: "*there is thunder because I was not nice*".

All these anthropomorphisms are more or less present in the child vision, the girls perceiving God's goodness, and the boys his strength or power: "*He is a nice man*" (g: 4 years); "*a strong man*" (b: 5 years). God's figure is double: 1) He is the creator (in his person and in his action), acting for humankind in general and more especially for the poor and the sick³; 2) He is a man, accompanying us.

Adventist children, when they speak of their God, utilize biblical pictures and metaphors taken from the stories they studied at home or in the church-school. The girls perceive God with sensibility: on one hand, He has the qualities of a creator and of a father, He provides for the basic wants and needs of his children, creating them, loving them, supervising them, nourishing them, keeping them; on the other hand, He appears like a King in His majesty: "*He is the creator of the earth, he loves us so much, he is the king of the world, our creator. He created us, gives us our food*" (g: 4 years). God is very often assimilated to Jesus: "*He is Jesus, an angel, he created us. He loves us and the poor*" (g: 5 years); "*He loves the animals. Jesus gives me to*

eat" (g: 5 and 1/2 years).

At 6 years, the girls perceive two polarities in God's person: He is near, present (Deus Revelatus= God's direct but limited disclosure), but also far away, distant, hiding His face from our view (Deus Absconditus), keeping His trustworthiness because He is concerned. The girls understand with shrewdness the position of God: He keeps a certain distance from His creature, requesting it's respect and devotion, but He also comes near; very close to us, because of His caring love: "He is very important. He is in the Bible. He is protecting me, he makes me happy" (g: 6 years); "*He is my father and my friend. He loves everybody*" (g: 6 years).

When they are 7 years old, the girls see God the thaumaturge and the friend, the mighty miracle-worker and the nice companion: "*He is a friend. He heals the sick*" (g: 7 years); "*He makes wonder*" (g: 7 years). He is localized in heaven: "*He is in the sky*" (g: 7 years). Some of His transcendental attributes like omniscience and omnipotence occur (eternity and omnipresence will appear later), combined with some personal attributes like friendship and love (His other theological qualities like wisdom, liberty, veracity and holiness are mentioned later).

The boys also perceive the personal and creator God, but they distinguish better His action than His own person: His handling and acts as the Creator concern not just people, but also the world of animals, of things, the course of events. The young boys confound God with Jesus and associate Him strongly with nature: "*He is Jesus*" (b: 4 years); "*He is in nature. He made the animals*" (b: 4 years).

God appears like a strong man to five year old boys, but it is still possible to "tame" Him, to "win Him over", because He uses His power with softness and His goal is what is best for all His children: God is almighty, but also very good (all-goodness), so He cannot be the cause of war or evil: "*He is a strong man. He created the earth, the animals, the dogs, the elephants*" (b: 5 years); "*He is Jesus, He is God. He created the universe, anybody. He is love, kind. He loves everybody, he is blessing us, he can stop war and keeps the poor*" (b: 5 years).

The central and non-negotiable assumption for the adventist children is that God exists and is the Creator-source of human power, because He has chosen to reveal to humans (individually and collectively), some traits of His nature (love, justice, holiness...) through the created world itself, through the inspired Scriptures and through Jesus Christ as the agent of creation and redemption.

The same description of God are found among the six and seven year old boys, but He appears more as the life-sustainer: "*He is the life. He is a man living in heaven. He gave us nature and is our protector. He gives us life and strength*" (b: 6 years); "*He is a man. He loves us*" (b: 7 years); "*He is a nice man. He makes miracles*" (b: 7 years); "*He is the lord. He gives us the sun*" (b: 7 and 1/2 years,

envisaging a very functionalistic God, removed from a machine like universe, which was created and set in motion to follow endlessly the laws of nature). The Christian tenet that shapes the adventist comprehension is the doctrine of creation: even for our children, the created order is the result of the imagination and work of the transcendent, loving God . The adventist perception of the doctrine of creation is supported by the doctrine of incarnation in asserting that human being is involved in the created order: as God honoured creation by Himself becoming man in Jesus Christ, His children can honour Him by being involved in promoting justice and love, which enrich human life and society (the family).

God is still in the sky or in heaven and the boys describe the materiality and the topographic aspects of his habitation more easily than the girls: "*He is in the sky, in his golden house*" (b:5 years); "*in the city of heaven*" (b: 7 years); "*in heaven with his angels*" (b: 7 years). These differences of appreciation are not a surprise, because we know that girls (females in general), are sensitive to the atmosphere, the emotional environment; therefore the boys (males in general) give priority to the place, the space, the structure itself.

III. THE "FRIEND YOU CAN'T LEAVE" OR THE CONCEPT OF GOD AMONG CHILDREN BETWEEN SEVEN AND ELEVEN

In the Concrete Operations stage (7-11 years), the operational child is freed from the pull of immediate perception: "operations" meaning the activities of the mind opposed to the bodily activities of the sensori-motor period. The operations involved are called "concrete" because they relate directly to objects and not yet to verbally stated hypotheses, as is the case with the propositional operations that are presented in the Formal Operations stage.

The Concrete Operation structures (schemas) are analogous to particular operations that have been identified in mathematical and logical disciplines. A "Concrete Operation" implies underlying general systems or "groupings" such as classification, serialization, number. Its applicability is limited to objects considered as real (concrete). These new mental abilities, which constitute a set of internalized actions, permit children to do in their heads what before they had to do with their hands. Now the child becomes able to handle complex logical systems, by the process of combination, of associativity, of reversibility and of identity. The concrete operations are unconscious: the child does not know that he or she is employing them, and the thought is still limited to concrete experience: so he understands God's love through the mediation of the witness of his own parents or teachers; he (she) is not yet capable of dealing completely with abstract thought like the mystery of Trinity, of immortality...

For the eight year old girls, God is still the creator-miracle-worker and a father, but he is also the "friend you can't leave" because He is providing for your basic needs and expressing His love: "*He is the creator. He takes care for us*" (g:8 years); "*He is the saviour. He is listening to my prayers, and protecting me*" (g: 8 years); "*He is my friend, he created me*" (g: 8 years); "*He is my friend whom I can't leave. He watches all I do, he forgives me and guides me in my life*" (g: 8 years).

God is involved in His creative activity and in man's creative activities, and the nine year old adventist children have an unreserved confidence in God's purposes for them and for the world in general⁴: God not only provides for our basic needs (He gives life, food and drink, the air to breathe...), but also for our more elaborate and complex needs (He offers His protection, consolation, comfort, healing, forgiveness, safety, His presence in loneliness...). God is acting for the child himself but also for the group (family, class, team) to which he belongs to: "*He is our friend, our father. He works miracles, he is protecting us and gives us consolation*" (g: 9 years); "*He changes my heart and he is my saviour*" (g: 9 years); "*He is our father. He is helping us, giving us food and he guides us*" (g: 9 and 1/2 years).

The ten and eleven year old girls have a more christ-centred and soteriological vision: Christ appears as the saviour, the redeemer and the Messiah; the biblical references are more explicit, the eschatological reality (the Lord's coming) is outlined and God's retributive justice announced. This stage of life underlines the adventist specificity as the "people of the book and of prophecy": "*He is the Messiah. He is preparing us a place*" (g: 10 years); "*He is the creator. He is preparing a place in heaven for us to live in because he is soon coming*" (g: 10 years); "*He is the messiah. He came to redeem us from evil*" (g: 10 years); "*He is my only saviour. He is preparing us a place and helping us*" (g: 10 years); "*God is a father and more than a friend. He is watching over us and saves us from Satan*" (g: 10 and 1/2 years).

The teenagers mention the theological aspect of God's action against evil (evil understood as a principle, an action and a person, which are best represented by the devil and his involvement). The problem of the trinity appears for the first time in terms of persons and their action, but the general picture is still imprecise. Some of the transcendent attributes of God are mentioned (eternity, omniscience) with some of His human qualities: (God-the-father, His love, His holiness). Prayer is the best way to be in contact with Him: "*He is the creator of the world, the one you can trust in. He is watching over us, and helping us in our weakness*" (g: 11 years); "*He is our saviour and lord. He delivers us, he is helping us and punishing the wicked*" (g: 11 years); "*He is the creator and our saviour. He forgives our sins, and is helping us to be kind, not to dispute; he can help us love our enemies, he is listening to my prayers*" (g: 11 years); "*He is God, the Holy Spirit.. He is our judge...*" (g: 11 years); "*God is Jesus, the redeemer of the earth, the king of the universe, the Holy Spirit, he is eternal. He knows anything, loves us, answers our prayers, everything depends on him*" (g: 11 and 1/2 years).

The localization of God is the same, except for a new quality having to do with God's transcendent person: He is "*everywhere*", because His omnipresence and His ubiquity enable Him to be in several places at the same time: "*He is anywhere and everywhere. He is in my heart, in heaven, in the church*" (g: 11 years).

The boys also view God as the creator and the father, but they underline more than the girls the strength and vigour of God's action, giving His person more importance and majesty. The trinity is still a strange mystery: "*He is the creator. He is watching over us*" (b: 8 years); "*He is our father, helping us*" (b: 8 years); "*He is the creator, taking care of us and sending us his holy spirit*" (b:8 years); "*He is the saviour, the messiah. He is healing the sick, and saving our lives*" (b: 9 years); "*Jesus is a man who divided himself into three: God, Jesus, Holy Spirit*" (b: 9 years); "*God is mighty, he created the earth and heaven. He does miracles*" (b: 9 years); "*He is the redeemer and the creator. He punishes disobedient people*" (b:9 and 1/2 years).

For the teenagers, God expresses His power in His actions as the creator and also in the moral demands He makes of us. As the king, He affirms His reign over all creation (nature, humankind), and He shows love in the preventative and curing care he gives us to restore our health: "*He is the master and lord of universe. He takes care of us*" (b:10 years); "*He is a strong and mighty man. He reigns over all humankind*" (b: 10 years); "*he is the greatest king. He is helping us*" (b: 10 years); "*He is the saviour, he can heal and resuscitate*" (b: 10 years); "*He is our protector*" (b: 11 years); "*He is our saviour, our help in danger*" (b: 11 years).

The localization is quite similar to that of the girls: "*God is in my heart*" (b: 10 years), "*in heaven*" (b: 11 years): "*He is everywhere, beside you, beside me, he can be somewhere else. He can be here and at the same time in China or in Japan*" (b:11 years). The teenagers have a real sense of humour when they talk about their God, His place of habitation, and some of His qualities in time (eternity) or space (ubiquity).

The last stage reveals a more personal God, interfering as a regulator and a moderator of the tensions occurring in the more troubled stage of adolescence and youth. This period is "value laden", God calls for an unreserved commitment to Him and for a confidence in His promises through self-giving devotion.

IV. THE MORE PERSONAL GOD FOR TEENAGERS BETWEEN ELEVEN AND FIFTEEN

In the Formal Operations Stage (11-15 years), the abstract operations appear: thinking refers to all possible relationships between variables rather than to relationships constrained by reference to particular instances. The student becomes

capable of logical thinking with abstractions; that is, with the "possible" as well as the "here and now". Scientific thinking of the hypothetico-deductive type is possible. The teenager can draw conclusions, offer interpretations, and develop hypotheses. He can work out all the logical possibilities, conduct a combinational analysis of potentialities, think proportionally, and generalize from proportions based on one kind of content (such as water, wood pieces, markers, all liquids and all numerically denotable quantities...). Now the adolescent's systematic mental operations have reached a higher degree of equilibrium, his thought is flexible and effective; he can imagine the many possibilities inherent in a situation.

In his moral development, the child received from outside himself the example of codified rules but he imitated others with a purely individual use of the examples received. After eleven years of age, the child is accepting coercive rules which are regarded as sacred and untouchable, emanating from adults and lasting for ever. Every possible alteration strikes the child as a transgression. Now autonomy follows heteronomy: the rule appears to the child no longer as an external law, sacred insofar as it has been laid down by adults, but as an outcome of a free decision. When it replaces the rules of constraint the rule of cooperation becomes an effective moral law and the early belief in immanent justice tends to disappear slowly: the automatic punishment which emanates from things themselves (knives cut children who have done what is forbidden in their use).

To summarize, we can distinguish three broad stages in the development of the idea of justice:

- 1) Up to the age of seven or eight, what is just is what is enjoined by adult authority,
- 2) Between eight and eleven, equality becomes the governing principle of justice: this period may be defined by the progressive development of autonomy and the priority of equality over authority. Belief in immanent justice is perceptibly on the decrease and moral action is sought for its own sake, independent of reward or punishment;
- 3) After about eleven, egalitarianism is replaced by equity, taking account of individual circumstances, e.g., respect due to age or previous service rendered⁵.

At this point we overstep the too narrow piagetian framework and come to more basic adventist assumptions: adventist teenagers find in the incarnation and in the creation, the double bridge which joins the transcendent and the immanent God: the transcendent God, with His omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence and eternity is external, superior to the world the children live in; but the immanent God (the loving father, the incarnate logos in Jesus Christ, the nice friend...) is very near and concerned, and for the adolescent, he becomes more and more a personal God, sharing spiritual virtues like an unreserved commitment to Him, a great confidence in His Word; moral virtues like love, fairness, the courage of one's convictions, integrity and a commitment to justice and love in every area of life; intellectual virtues like a breadth of understanding, openness to new ideas, intellectual honesty about other

views, the "*ability to say the right thing in the right way at the right time*", the capability making sound decisions.

God, as our teenagers see Him, is the transcendent God, 1) cause of the universe because He is the creator of earth and heaven, 2) prime or secondary cause of some social and material events, the direct reason of some miracles (God-thaumaturge, who interferes in the private and collective life of His creatures), 3) cause of religious experiences and sometimes of mystical emotions. Adventist adolescents see the immanent God as their father: the filiation with Him implies relationship and solidarity with humankind, and enough imagination to work out the daily problems in fresh ways. God's wisdom is the help they need for seeing what is right, good and true.

For our children, God keeps the qualities He had before, but the perception is more detailed: He is the creator, providing for order in the world, as a king does for his country or as a father uses to do for his family. God is supervising the life of men and of nature, historical events are a product of both human actions and the actions of His supernatural power: He remains the sovereign ruler over history (even if men can cooperate), He is in the control of the course of history, but we as human beings retain freedom of choice⁶. We can be transformed through redemption by the saviour and redeemer, and following His example, we ought to forgive and use compassion: "*He is my creator. He is protecting me*" (g: 12 years); "*He is the King of kings. He knows everything, he sees even the secrets we try to hide. He wants to save us if we do what he requires*" (g:12 years); "*He is the almighty God, helping us in our difficulties*" (g: 12 years); "*He is my friend, my saviour. He gives what I need for living*" (g: 12 years); "*he makes peace on earth*" (g: 12 years); "*He is the creator, our lord. He punishes the wicked, he is listening to our prayers and delivering us from evil*" (g: 12 years); "*He is our father, makes us free and forgives us our sins*" (g: 13 years); "*He is king of kings, he is Jesus, the holy-spirit and God at the same time, he performs miracles*" (g: 13 years); "*God is our creator, our father and our hope. He is watching over us, protecting us, consoling and comforting us*" (g: 14 years); "*He is in my body, because my body is his living temple*" (g: 14 years); "*He is in heaven, but also beside me in what I do*" (g: 15 years).

The boys give more emphasis than the girls the acting power of a mighty God, Who is triumphing through His justice and love. These overcome all difficulties and exalt His glory: "*He is King of kings*" (b: 12 years); "*God is our creator, he is our father and the creator. He is mighty, wise. He gives life and saves from sin*" (b: 12 years); "*He is the creator of the earth and the universe. He is our lord. He can cleanse the heart of thieves, of the wicked. He can make miracles He can see us, even if we try to hide away*" (b: 12 years and 1/2); "*He is our saviour. He is protecting me from evil and temptation. He helps me in difficult times*" (b: 13 years); "*He is the creator, a spirit, he takes care of the problems of the universe*" (b: 13 years); "*He has control over life*" (b: 13 years).

These adventist teenagers (without being theologians) give some theological arguments in favour of God's existence: 1) the cosmological argument: God created the world, the cosmos, with order and methodically: "*He is the creator, everything depends on him; nothing is made by-accident*" (b: 14 years). God has a sense of beauty and aesthetics (cosmos means the created and the nice world: cosmos, cosmetics..): "*He makes what is good, well and fine*" (b: 14 years); 2) the teleological argument: the created world has an origin and corresponds to a task and purpose, the universe I live in has an aim and follows a design: "*God is the creator of earth and heaven. He helps us finding the right way and is expecting every human being to be saved*" (b: 15 years); 3) the soteriological argument: "*God is the saviour of humankind. He is my redeemer*" (b: 14 years). The main purpose of God is to save His creatures and to bring them to happiness: "*God is our saviour and he created our world. He is listening to us and wants us to be saved, if we trust in him. He wants every human being to be saved*" (b: 15 years).

The localization of God is classical: "*He is in heaven*"; "*He is everywhere*". The boys underline more the topographic and geographic aspects: "*God is in the galaxy and in my heart*" (b: 12 years); "*God is in heaven, in the New Jerusalem*" (b: 14 years).

All the findings of our survey have educational implications, specifically for religious education understood as the action exercised on the child for assisting his quest for God and his search for meaning. Education in general can be defined as "*the deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to transmit or evoke, knowledge, attitudes, values, skills, and sensibilities*"⁷. Religious education (the art and science connecting men to God), implies instruction, it relates to some practices (prayer, Bible studies, attending church service...), it deals with some facts (history of salvation), it has a set of doctrines (God's existence, the person and action of Christ, the law...). The Bible is the main textbook, the main source of data for understanding the world in which we live: it is the standard for truth, a criterion by which truth from other sources is judged. Children are to be trained in the way they should walk (Prov. 22,6) and the Scriptures are to be persistently taught to provide wisdom and salvation (2 Tim. 3, 15).

V. IMPLICATIONS FOR ADVENTIST EDUCATION

A. Basic assumptions:

The Bible contains for Adventists the explicit mandate to prepare people (not just children) to live effective lives in the world into which God has placed them: for subduing and ruling the earth (Gen. 1, 28), for providing for our families (1 Tim. 5,

8), for experiencing the maturation of faith and reason, understanding religion as a dynamic organisation of cognitive-affective-conative factors, which can be analyzed in terms of beliefs, feelings and actions.

Mature Adventist religious beliefs are characterized by 1) lack of contamination by childish wishes: our conscientiousness and helpfulness meaning a serving but not servile manner, 2) deep involvement in the world in terms of fighting for justice and sharing one's personal resources with others, 3) a high awareness of clear convictions, which we call the "Present Truth", and which help faith come alive as a result of the interplay between God's supernatural purpose and our action as the people of His covenant 4) the conviction of the existence of a Being greater than oneself, appearing as God our creator and father (also as our mother, as we see later) in His transcendent and immanent aspects, comprehensiveness and articulation in a manner that serves well in the search for meaning, and trying to achieve and fulfil God's will expressed in Scriptures.

Religious feelings correspond to a profound experience of spiritual oneness resulting in feelings of wonder and awe, elation, freedom and gratefulness because we as adventists know that we are the creatures of a loving God.

Our actions are characterized by 1) the presence of love as a comprehensive action with productivity, humility and responsibility as natural signs of this love expressed in Scriptures in terms of "agape", 2) a dynamic balance between commitment and tentativeness⁸.

We therefore propose a Four-fold Model of Adventist Education based on God's Disclosure and on the Nature of Biblical Revelation.

B. A Four-Fold Model of Adventist Education based on God's Disclosure and on the Nature of Biblical Revelation:

Our children's have shown us that they identify a pleasant-faced God in both His person and action (creator, father, friend, life-sustainer, king...), Who has made Himself known to them in many ways, of which we underline the four major ones: through 1) events, 2) through persons, 3) through the biblical picture of a father and of a mother, 4) through propositions or principles⁹.

Firstly God had made Himself known in certain events of history (understood as History of Salvation): the Sabbath (creation), Exodus (Ex. 12, 37-18, 27) and Pentecost are examples. Secondly, God has also explained Himself to humanity in the realm of personal revelation: the culmination of this revelatory activity was in the Christ event in which humanity had a living example of God's glory in Jesus (see

Heb. 1, 1 and John 1, 1-5). Thirdly, the Bible gives many examples of God's disclosure, perceived as a father (Mat. 6, 6), a daddy (Abba), and a mother (this last aspect is missing in our usual perception); and fourthly, in the Biblical narrative we find recorded the basic truth or propositions which grow out of God's revelatory activity. For us as Adventists, these are the eternal truth, the Ten Commandments of the Old Covenant and of the New Testament: the Bible has a holistic perspective, reflecting aspects of the four elements of the model we propose: the events, the persons (existential aspect), the biblical figure of God-daddy and mummy (parental aspect with identification) and the rational (principles, when Scripture is more appealing to the mind).

These different modes of God's Disclosure and Biblical Revelation, fostered by our children's answers, have led us to a four-fold model of adventist education. The history of salvation events suggests a celebration emphasis: "Look what God has done!"; the personal dimension suggests an interaction or experiential approach directed toward nurturing a personal link between God and the believer: "Look Who God is!"; the parental model leads to a closer relationship between God and His children in the brotherhood and sisterhood of humankind (family, school, church...): "Listen to what God said!"; the principle or propositional aspect issues forth in a didactic instruction model. This is the school aspect where what God has said is taught and explained, in an appeal to the mind and to reason.

Consequently we have:

<u>Knowing God through:</u>	<u>Adventist teaching model of:</u>
1. Events.....	Celebration.
2. Persons.....	Personal experience
3. Biblical parental figure.....	Brotherhood (Fellowship)
4. Principles.....	Didactic instruction

1. Adventist Education through Celebration

Celebration as a model of religious education finds its initial impetus in the creation narration with the sabbath and in the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel. Covenant renewal, with the sabbath laying the foundations of time and God's presence midst His people, is the major focus of Scriptures. The covenant relationship, that Yahweh would be the God of the old and new generation of Israelites, and that they would love Him with all their heart, soul and mind (Deut. 6, 3-7) was not for the present generation alone, but was to be transmitted to the coming

generation. The transmission function was placed in the laps of the parents and was to be carried out in the arena of the family. Yahweh then instructed that celebration be one of the processes of transmitting the covenant relationship (Ex. 12, 1-4): the specific event is the exodus, which is to be remembered in the Passover celebration. Such historical events provide meaning, purpose, direction and identity to a people, reminding them of their mighty Creator and loving King. The celebration is a process in which the event is remembered and the contributing factors (God the creator in the sabbath, Yahweh in the exodus...) are extolled and praised.

In the proclamation, the present generation is nurtured in its commitment to the meaning of the event, while the coming generation of children are schooled in the orientational values arising from the historical event.

For the Israelites, the renewal of the covenant was nurtured by the investment of time and energy necessary for the celebration of the Passover, and the amount of work and effort invested in the Passover (for us in the weekly sabbath) tells the children the importance of these celebrations. All the family is involved: both parents and children, they prepare the house for the sabbath, each believer prepares himself for the meeting with his creator, the mothers prepare special food, the members scrub the entire house, the mothers wash all the linen: it is a demanding task.

In addition, the actual food and the functions of the ceremonies were (are) rich in symbolism and instruction: the lamb's blood denoted expiation; the bitter herbs, the suffering in Egypt; and the unleavened bread denoted purity. The father was to question the children about the meaning of the ceremony. If they could not answer the questions, he instructed them on the meaning of the event behind the celebration. Thus the covenant was transmitted from generation to generation.

In the New Testament, we are instructed to celebrate the crucifixion in the communion service. This is one of the specifically commanded celebrations in the church. It provides an opportunity of nurturing our covenant with God through Christ's sacrifice. A family celebrating worship together (Sabbath, The Last Supper, Passover...) provides an opportunity for parents to tell their children the importance of God's actions, of Christ's death and resurrection, and of the Holy-Spirit's working. The same holds true for the celebration of a baptism or of a marriage: in these ways the faith once delivered to the believers and the divine power acting efficiently can be transmitted and brought up to date from generation to generation.

2. Adventist Education through Personal Experience

God has chosen to make Himself personally known to humanity. He met Moses on the Mount in the giving of the Law. In the New Covenant, through Christ

(incarnation), God has presented humanity a living example of His grace and mercy (John 14, 8-9): Jesus is a living embodiment of the personhood of God in the tabernacle of the flesh (Heb. 1, 2). It means personal, experience-centred revelation. This is learning through personal experience: knowing God not only involves remembering His great acts in creation and in history, but experiencing the relationship He has desired for us. Those who had the privilege of living with Jesus experienced in relationship with Him the mercy, the forgiveness, and the grace of the Logos made flesh.

The same relationships live on today in the fellowship of the church which is Christ's body here and now: today, his body, the church, embodies his spirit (John 14, 18-20). In this way God's spirit abides in the lives of the individual Christian and in the corporate fellowship of the church. Through the fellowship we can experience the mercy, grace, forgiveness and humility of God (in His immanent aspects), that Christ died to establish. A husband forgiving his wife, a parent forgiving a child, a child forgiving a parent, the reconciliation of long time enemies are all ways of knowing God when it is His Spirit that enables Christians to produce such fruit.

3. Adventist Education through God's figure as a father (daddy) and mother (mummy)

The Bible not only reveals God as my Father in Heaven (Mat 6, 11-15), but also as a closer and more concerned parent, a mummy and a daddy, which enables me to consider all creatures as His children, as my brother and sister, in the great brotherhood and solidarity of the human family: this is learning resulting from studying God's Word and from living in the redemptive family of God, both at the nuclear (home) and larger congregation (church, school, society) levels. Such a brotherhood and a solidarity will be an example to those outside the faith and will serve as an attraction to become an organic part of such fellowship. Not only does such Adventist education transpire in the fellowship of the macroscopic family of God, His Church (ekklesia and koinonia), but a more fertile environment for such learning is the adventist (christian) family, dealing very closely with His word.

Three texts reveal God as my daddy (Abba): Mark 14, 36: "*And he said, Abba, Father, all thing are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt*"¹⁰. Jesus is alone in Gethsemane, His friends abandon Him in the isolation of His pain and His agony. His greatest pain was to feel isolated, misunderstood and forsaken. He needed the help and the comfort only God-Abba (daddy) could offer Him: He was not lacking of faith, but just suffering because God seemed so far away. In reality God is very close to us in the midst of sorrow, we just need to keep in touch with Him, to rely on Him.

We can also mention Rom. 8, 14-16: "*For as many are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God*". So the Holy Spirit is telling my mind: God-daddy loves you, you are His son and don't have to be afraid, because He always wants what is best for you. So each adventist child can understand that God adopted him and that he is born again, liberated from all bondage of sin, fear and sadness.

Finally we should mention Gal. 4, 6-7: "*And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ*". The Holy Spirit enables me to recognize Him as my daddy: it requires the work of the Trinity to get this perception and vision of God as my Abba (daddy).

God is very close and concerned and I remain His child, even if I sometimes disobey. That is the Good News of the Gospel, discovering God's disclosure from this new biblical perspective, helps me to overcome the hindrance to my fulfilment when I accept the peace, the security and the forgiveness offered by God-my-daddy, but also by God-my-mummy¹¹.

He (She) gives unconditional love as my mother, sharing with me His (Her) affection, compassion, and acceptance: Is. 49, 14-15: "*But Zion said, the Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee*". I was born from God and He (She) provides for all my needs: "*He that giveth breath unto the people*" (Is. 42, 5). God shows His (Her) motherlove in action "*Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child*" (Ps. 131, 2). He gives His creature his real value: "*For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth well... Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect...*" (Ps. 139, 13-16). God can now dry the tears I shed: "*as one whom his mother comfort, so will I comfort you*" (Is. 66, 13-14), and He is ready to do it at the end of time: "*God shall wipe away all the tears from their eyes*" (Rev. 21, 4). God is like an eagle protecting her nest: "*As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings, so the lord alone did lead him...*" (Deut. 32, 11-12). He guides me and all His people, I feel confident and secure under Her wings of love: "*Hide me under the shadow of his wings*" (Ps. 17, 8-9); "*He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler*" (Ps. 91, 4). He sets me free from my enemies and carries me to freedom: "*Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagle's wings, and brought you unto myself*" (Ex. 19, 4). So He (She) is acting, interfering in my life, supporting me, but

respecting my free choice; He just wants to give me tenderness and consolation, even if I sometimes refuse: "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!*" (Mat. 23, 37).

God is present, always ready to stretch out His arms of justice (as He did on the cross) and love (like a mother embracing her kid, or like an eagle with her children), opening His wings of reconciliation. He has both the qualities of a father (a daddy) and of a mother (mummy): justice and love, severity and tenderness. In Him (Her), the law and the gospel join together in harmony and balance, and He (She) is present, concerned (immanent and transcendent), going with His child all along his way through the seasons of life: "*Even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you*" (Is. 46, 4).

4. Adventist Education through Didactic Instruction

God has appeared in history through events, appeared personally in Christ, in His Word as a father(daddy) and a mother (mummy), and He has also revealed His will through the written record, the Bible. Contained in this record are the principles, propositions, commands, and abiding truths of His will for humanity. These principles and truths are normative criteria for us as Adventists, in evaluating the quality of our relations with God and humans to determine if we are obedient to His instructions. As such, these recorded principles such as the Ten Commandment and the entire message of the Scriptures, are designed to appeal to the whole person, not just his feelings, but also his mind and character. We referred to this as the cognitive and conative domain. This is the objective, reason or mind-centred, or informational and aspect of God's revelatory activity, completing the more emotional and affective aspect of His father- and mother-like disclosure. It provides the teaching and educational enterprise with a wealth of didactic and instructive responsibility. This specific domain issues forth in the responsibilities of instructing the constituency of our church and family in the major doctrines of the Bible. They need to be applied to contemporary issues facing our faith today such as race relations, abortion, violence as we deal with an imminent century, the energy and ecological crisis, unemployment...etc

This is knowing God with both the heart and the mind: Jesus' commission to make disciples of all nations: "*Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*" and to teach the believers to observe all His commands (Mat. 28, 18-20), provides the impetus for this Model of Adventist Education.

VI. CONCLUSION

We have conducted a survey of our children and adolescents' concept of God parallel to the Piagetian Stages of Cognitive and Moral Development:

- 1) the preoperational stage (2-7 years): God has two dominant personae: the creator and thaumaturge, and a "mighty" man standing beside us, helping and caring for us like a good friend. Boys see His powerful activity and the objective aspect of His place of habitation, girls His loving person and the tender atmosphere He establishes,
- 2) the concrete operations stage (7-11 years): to girls, God is the friend you can't leave, because He provides for our basic needs (life, air, food) and also for more complex needs (protection, comfort, healing, forgiveness). He still appears as the saviour (Christ) and as one person of the trinity (this concept is not very clear at this stage). To boys, God has the same qualities, but once again more in His doing than in His person: He is the mighty king, the handling and active friend, the omnipotent redeemer,
- 3) the formal operations stage (11-15 years): this is the time of logical thinking, of abstractions: God is more personal, and the combination of His transcendent and immanent qualities is easier. Thinking is more theological: God is the creator, he gives life a sense, He saves. The religious world view is more autonomous.

We have seen how important the double aspect of God's disclosure is: His transcendent qualities (omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence as the creator, the life-sustainer and the miracle-maker, the King of kings, eternity) coupled with His immanent attributes: God the friend, the concerned father (and the loving and caring mother), God revealed in Jesus and in creation...etc

We followed the principle that the source of our content (epistemology) should determine our pedagogy (educational models). The source of our adventist faith is the Bible and God's disclosure. Our research utilized the nature of biblical Revelation and the different modes of God's disclosure to derive a four-fold model for adventist education. Its four facets are:

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|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Events..... | Celebration |
| 2. Persons..... | Personal experience |
| 3. God's parental figure..... | Brotherhood |
| 4. Principles..... | Didactic Instruction |

Thus we can know God through ceremony, fellowship and brotherhood, the biblical model of God-the-Father and God-the-Mother, and instruction. This complementary approach allows us to build a biblically based model that can then utilize the findings of the social sciences without endangering ourselves by accepting

extra-biblical pre-suppositions and epistemologies. Such an approach we find promising for more effective religious adventist education. We know that it is not enough that we have a mastery of the content of our programmes: our children, our students, cannot be transformed just through exposure to brilliantly presented content, no more than neurotics can be transformed by just reading a textbook on abnormal psychology. In adventist education, as in psychotherapy, curative and long-lasting transformation is effected firstly through a process of maturation through events, secondly through a process of inter-personal relationship, thirdly through the identification with the double figure of God my mummy and my daddy, and fourthly through the interplay between principles understood in didactic instruction and people living them daily.

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END NOTES

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