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**THE ADVENTIST "PIONEER" THEOLOGICAL HERITAGE:
IMPLICATIONS FOR FAITH, TEACHING AND LEARNING**

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Introduction

One of the most critical moments in the ministry of Jesus is recorded in John 6 (NKJV) when many of His disciples withdrew and “walked with Him no more.” It was at this juncture that Jesus turns to the remaining “twelve” and asks: “Do you also want to go away” (vs. 67)? The response of Peter, framed as a rhetorical question, speaks eloquently and plaintively for the whole human race-- “Lord, to whom shall we go” (vs. 68)?

It is the settled conviction of this writer that the question of the meaning and destiny of human existence can only be found in the truth of Christ and His Gospel. There is really no other answer which can compete with it. Furthermore, the portrayal of Christ and His Gospel in the setting of the distinctive “theological” convictions of “Pioneer” Adventism (1845-1915) forms a uniquely comprehensive set of perspectives and beliefs. And these convictions have powerful potential to shape the Seventh-day Adventist Christian world-view, philosophy of life, mission and ethical perspective.

Adventist writer and historian George Knight has suggested that the two major theological accomplishments of the “Pioneer” period were to figure out what was “Adventist” and then what was “Christian” about the Seventh-day Adventist belief system (Knight 10). At the heart of all of these early developments was the Adventist “Messenger of the Lord,” Ellen G. White. As an acknowledged “prophetic” figure, she was the major *formative* force in not only “*ordaining*,” but also in “*confirming*” the key theological advances of the emerging Sabbatarian “Advent Movement.”¹

¹The italicized expressions in this paragraph are used with quite precise meanings: by *formative* I mean that which seeks an accepted interpretation of Scripture; this *formative* role is to be distinguished from that which is the *normative* or final authority in the formation of doctrine

As much as I am convinced of the truth and practical illuminating power of the above convictions, there is a major challenge which I face when attempting to articulate the basic contours of the Gospel and its proclamation within the setting of its distinctively Sabbatarian “Adventist” and “Christian” context: large numbers of undergraduate college students (especially of the general education variety) respond to it with dismissive yawns or barely concealed attitudes of impatient tolerance. The unspoken message is—“okay, come on, bring it on, let’s get it over with so that I can get to the really hard-core, practical stuff of my education!” Ah, what to do with these modern “cultured despisers of religion”?²

This essay will seek answers to this “what to do with them” question in four distinct sections: 1)clarify the comprehensive core of Seventh-day Adventist theology, 2)discuss strategies which will generate interest in the real possibilities which the Adventist version of Christian faith can contribute to the meaning of life and ethical formation and share what I have learned in making my experience of teaching Christian ethics interesting and appropriate to the reality of life, 3)layout some proposals as to how general education courses in basic theology can be made more interesting and critically applicable to the undergraduate experience and 4)conclude with some further considerations of the theological/philosophical shaping possibilities of an Adventist conditioned understanding of the Gospel and Christian theology.

(Scripture). Thus when Ellen White took a *formative* or leading role in doctrinal formation, she was *ordaining* a doctrine which she suggested should become clearly accepted as biblical. When she was functioning in a *confirming* way, she was putting her stamp of approval on what the “brethren” had done in biblical interpretation.

²This vividly descriptive expression comes from Friedrich Schleiermacher, the great Nineteenth Century father of theological liberalism.

The “Present Truth” and “Christian” Core of the “Adventist Gospel”

What do we mean by the expression “Present Truth”? This traditional term encompasses those doctrines which convey the theological consensus of early pioneer Seventh-day Adventism (1845-63) and helped the “pioneers” of mid-Nineteenth Century Adventism clarify what was more especially the “Adventist” component in their theology.

“Present Truth”

This consensus included the following doctrines: 1) Second Coming of Christ as literal, visible, imminent (soon, not hundreds of years away), and pre-millennial; 2) The Sanctuary ministry of Christ, which encompasses His work as High Priest in the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary and the “Investigative Judgment;” 3) The eternal authority of the law of God and the seventh-day Sabbath of the Fourth Commandment of the Ten Commandments; 4) The non-immortality of the soul (conditionalism) and the unconscious state of the dead ; 5) The annihilationist view of hell (the wicked will be totally destroyed); 6) The millennium as a period in which the redeemed rule in heaven with Christ while Satan presides over a totally desolated earth; 6) Spiritual Gifts, including the gift of prophecy, are all still active options for the Spirit to bestow upon the church of Christ; 7) Holistic Health (physical, mental, social, and spiritual) is greatly emphasized as an integral part of the process of mental, spiritual, and ethical development (i.e., sanctification); 8) A profound sense that, as the “Remnant Church,” Seventh-day Adventism has a special missional task which is fulfilling the prophetic vision of the three angels of Rev. 14.

Key Framing Perspectives

These distinctive, or “Present Truth” doctrines did not stand out as isolated pearls on a

string, but were given collective theological force through the shaping power of four key framing perspectives. These helped to cross pollinate the doctrines of “Present Truth” and create a theological framework in which to more clearly understand the “providential” (God ordained) meaning and purpose of human existence. These key perspectives include the following:

- 1) A hearty commitment to the Protestant *sola scriptura* principle. Thus there is the strong conviction regarding the primacy of Scriptural authority in all theological and ethical considerations.
- 2) Under the rubric of the primacy of Scripture, the apocalyptic portions of the biblical canon (especially Daniel, Jesus’ “Olivet Discourse”³ and the Revelation) were given a privileged place in the shaping of Adventist theology.
- 3) The “Great Controversy” motif. This meta-narrative traces the origin of sin in the person of Lucifer, God’s reaction to this celestial “fall” and how sin spilled over into this world with the earthly “fall” of Adam and Eve. This narrative then traces all of the redemptive initiatives which God has initiated for the salvation of humanity and the full restoration of harmony in the universe.
- 4) Sanctuary imagery (drawn from the books of Daniel, Revelation, Jesus’ “Olivet Discourse” and the NT book of Hebrews) and the “investigative judgment” were employed in the development of a cosmic “theodicy”⁴ which will undergird the salvational finale of the unfolding of the “Great Controversy” between Christ and Satan

³Reported by the synoptic writers in Matthew 24 and 25, Luke 17 and 21 and Mark 13.

⁴The expression “theodicy” is the technical term which has reference to any attempt to give some satisfactory theological explanation for the problem of evil.

The “Great Controversy” and “Sanctuary” Perspectives became the more self-conscious keys which aided in the bonding of the “pillars” or “landmarks” of “Present Truth” to the unfolding clarity with which “Pioneer” Seventh-day Adventism began to Embrace the “Eternal Verities”⁵ of the larger “orthodox,” “Christian” doctrinal heritage (both Eastern and “Latin”).

The “Eternal Verities”

The embracing of the “Eternal Verities” reflected a growing awareness of the importance of key doctrines bequeathed to Western Christianity through the decisions and creeds of the first four ecumenical councils (Nicea [325 A.D.], Constantinople [381 A.D.], Ephesus [432 A.D.], and Chalcedon [451 A.D.])⁶ and the later heritage of Protestant Reformers from 1517 to 1820 (Continental, British, and North American).

The most important doctrines retrieved by Adventism from this Heritage of Eastern and Latin Christian orthodoxy were the following: the 1)Trinity, with a special accent on the full deity and humanity Christ, the 2)essence of Augustine of Hippo’s emphasis on human depravity (in contrast of Pelagius’ view of optimism about human moral ability), the 3)Eastern Orthodox optimism of transforming grace and the 4)Latin emphasis on legal metaphors of salvation.

Furthermore, the “Eternal Verities” were augmented with the following from Adventism’s Protestant Heritage (1517–1850): the 1)great “*sola*’s” of Luther and Calvin (*fide-*

⁵The expression “Eternal Verities” was coined for Seventh-day Adventists by Leroy Edwin Froom to describe Adventism’s discriminating doctrinal appropriations from the larger or broader Christian Tradition, or the “Great Tradition” of twenty centuries of Christian theology.

“Here we are using the expression “ecumenical” in the following sense: that which was done with representation from the whole church, not just some regional council. Furthermore, it refers to those doctrines which attained universal acceptance among both Eastern and Western orthodox Christians.

faith, *scriptura-scripture*, *gratia-grace*, and the priesthood of all believers), the 2)Arminian perspectives (emphasis on free will) of Anglicanism and Wesleyanism and 3)Protestantism's reaffirmation of the early ecumenical (in the sense of universally acknowledged) heritage of emphasis on total human depravity, legal metaphors of salvation and the optimism of grace (sanctifying grace, especially as it was filtered through the Arminian Wesleyans). Finally, Adventism heartily embraced 4)English and American Revivalism, with its conversionist and missional burdens, and 5)American "Restorationism" with its radical biblicist, optimistic individualism and "sanctified" rationalism.

The collective effect of all of the above was to raise consciousness about the centrality of the saving significance of the Person of Christ, His life, death, resurrection, ascension, and enthronement as Advocating Intercessor in the heavenly Sanctuary.

While "Pioneer" SDA's were truth-driven seekers for biblical-based doctrinal clarity, they gradually came to understand that the exaltation of not only the teachings, but also the person and work of Christ would serve as a catalyst for a deeper experience in the things of God. And this deeper, Christo-centric perspective would give birth to a revival which would prove to be more loving and winsome (and more effective) in its service and witness to the world.

In the context of the "Great Controversy" and "Sanctuary" themes and the growing appreciation of the greater "Orthodox" and Protestant heritage of the "eternal verities" of the faith, Ellen and James White developed a painfully perceptive awareness of the spiritual aridity among the "truth" burdened "saints" of the Adventist "Remnant:" And it was this realization which led to the stirring conviction that Christ, His Cross, and the love of God not only needed to enter into Adventism's doctrinal development, but also into its collective spiritual growth.

These developments ultimately led Ellen White to her most profoundly stirring portrayals of the Love of God. Furthermore, such portrayals were accompanied with earnest appeals to God's people to embrace this love divine as it has been manifest in the saving work of Christ and the redemptive movings of the Holy Spirit. These portrayals included the following:

Doctrinally, Godly love was poignantly described as a profoundly balanced unfolding of the divine justice and mercy which resides in the very core of God's nature: Such love was expressed in other more theologically practical and tensional balancing acts--Law and Grace, justification and sanctification, lingering mercy and inevitable executionary judgment.

This crucial and climactic exposition of the love of God (especially in the setting of Christ's atoning death on Calvary), the recovery of the doctrine of the Trinity in the setting of the "Great Controversy" theme and Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, all come together in the "most holy" place of the writings of Ellen White--*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 761-763.

It is in the context of Ellen White's ministry from 1888 to 1901 that Seventh-day Adventism really embraces the task of integrating its "Adventist," or "Present Truth" Heritage with its larger "Orthodox"⁷ and Protestant Heritage. The fruit of this integrating effort was a self-conscious effort to make the "proclamation" of the Three Angels Messages (the "Present Truth" or the "Pillars" and "Landmarks" of distinctive Adventism) more Christ and Cross centered. And this Christo- and cruci-centric effort resulted in the uplifting of the great theme of all themes—the Trinitarian love of God for alienated, depraved and unworthy sinners.

⁷Once more, we need to alert the reader that we are using the term "Orthodox" to refer to both the Latin, or Western Roman Catholic Tradition and the Eastern, or Greek Catholic Tradition of Churches. The latter are usually referred to as the "Orthodox" family of churches headed by the Patriarch of Constantinople (present day Istanbul, Turkey).

Ellen White, the Adventist “Pioneer” par-excellence, was in the vanguard of every significant theological, revival, and missional renewal of Seventh-day Adventism. She is the great hero of these significant theological and practical developments. Without her contributions, there is a very good chance that Seventh-day Adventists would have evolved into a semi-Christian cult.

While we have briefly laid out the major contours of “Pioneer” Adventism’s doctrinal structure, I will draw out their pedagogical implications later on in this paper. This will include an articulation of its irreducible core and the manner in which this core will drive theological reflection for the development of a credible world-view, philosophy of life, and source of ethical principles and values. Before we do this, however, we will turn to some very practical teaching strategies which are unfolding in my pilgrimage as an Adventist religion teacher.

Strategies to Generate Interest in the Practical and Critical Implications of Theology

My frustrations with the manifest indifference (and even the sometime outright challenge to the relevance of theological reflection) has forced me to do some focused thinking about strategies which can be employed to awaken a felt need to engage in the fruitful task of theological reflection. I have tried to come up with some penetrating questions to raise consciousness about the need to carefully and intentionally ponder the meaning of life for both time and eternity.

Questions for “Starters”

What follows is a somewhat random listing of representative conversation “starters:”

Do you have any coherent way to make sense of the manifest injustices which afflict vast

numbers of the human race? Are these injustices all that such afflicted humans can expect in the natural flow of things?

Can you explain what it means to be human? Does it really matter if you are able to explain where you have come from and where you might be headed? What about the problem of death, especially “pre-mature” death? Do you have any hopeful answer that has the potential for comfort for the bereaved?

What is your understanding of a truly fulfilling life? What does it mean to live life and “live it more abundantly?” Do you really think that you can find full satisfaction in life through professional success and financial well-being? If so, why is it that so many seemingly successful people slide into despair, even suicide?

Can you explain why it is that humans continue to experience guilt? Do you believe that right and wrong are only relative terms and that each moral dilemma can only be settled emotionally or situationally? Does your moral perspective enable you to prioritize different forms of evil? For instance, would you rather have your “significant other” raped or have her purse stolen? Would you really want to argue that the death of the family pet has the same sort of moral implications as that of a young mother of three pre-schoolers? Can there be any such category of beings called “human” if moral responsibility is thrown out? Are human beings more naturally good or are they basically corrupted by pervasive selfishness?

Does it really make any difference spiritually and morally if you view God as personal (in a monotheistic sense) or as impersonal, or diffused (in the pantheistic sense)? If God is the Creator of the world, does it make any real difference if He is viewed as monotheistically unitarian or Trinitarian in nature? What do you make of the death and resurrection of Jesus? Do

you understand these events to be critically important to your future and the meaning of life?

While we could go on with others, I do sense that these questions demand an answer from anybody who wants to make sense of the meaning and destiny of human life. But now comes the question as to how we practically construct specific courses in the undergraduate theological curriculum to facilitate serious, critical, and analytical reflection on these questions?

Teaching a “General Education” Course in Ethics

In my own teaching experience, the unanticipated challenge of teaching the undergraduate general education course in Christian ethics has been an eye opener. I did approach this course with some trepidation (but not for lack of interest). The fear arose from the fact that I was rather “unethical” when it came to my scholarly experience—I just had never given ethics the same type of sustained, scholarly attention that I had given to the issues of historical and systematic theology. What this “unethical” state of affairs forced me to do was to make the course much more class-centered and much less lecture oriented. Such a move went contrary to my customary inclinations, which were to do a large amount of reading in ethical literature and come up with many lectures on all the aspects of ethical foundations and the multitude of pressing ethical dilemmas which confront 21st Century Christians.

I, however, finally decided to employ the following basic strategies: the first step was to press upon the students some of the most urgent ethical questions that they will face (dilemmas which come sooner than they might think). The next step was to explore with them the classic approaches to ethics. Then I proceeded to lay out the argument for an ethic which combined deontological (or an ethic based on objective moral principles largely discovered through general

and special revelation) with character or virtue ethics (the idea that it is more important to be a virtuous person than to be able to spell out right principles and laws for each ethical dilemma), supplemented with a dose of teleological considerations (the ethical end or result of a certain course of action—the most common form being utilitarianism). The final step in these preliminary lectures was to demonstrate how the more ethical portions of Scripture could be supplemented with ethical perspectives of Christian valuation which can be drawn from the great Christian doctrines.

With these foundational issues in place, I then gave them a basic seven-step approach with which they can methodically, critically and analytically confront any ethical or moral dilemma (drawn from Scott B. Rea's Moral Choices).

The most daring strategy (for preachy me) which I then invoked, however, was to divide the class up into teams of three, have them pick an ethical conundrum, and make a presentation to the class. This presentation involved clearly laying out the ethical dilemma with a skit or scenario, suggest what the ethical alternatives might be, share what alternative they chose and then critically justify the choice(s) they made. In other words they had to share what ethical principle(s) they invoked which suggested a decision that would reflect the best ethical justification. The final thing they were required to do was to pose some “starter” questions for the class discussion.

I must admit that I have been pleasantly surprised by the informed discussions which have been generated and the positive response of the students. This course is consistently the highest rated among all of my student evaluations and the most popular upper division general education religion course we offer at Andrews University.

While this middle section of the course is very class-centered, I do take a leading part in the discussions which follow each of the student team presentations. I generally try to let the presenters have first right of response to any questions or challenges which are raised; but I have discovered that the students do not mind if I throw in my own questions and reflections. This gives them a chance to really confront the issues and me a chance to offer some perspective on a number of important ethical challenges.

The final two or three weeks are used to review any topics that the students or I sensed needed some further attention and discussion. The finale of the course features a very practical discussion on the ethics of courtship and some concluding reflections on virtue ethics.

Suggested Strategies for Greater Class Involvement in General Theology Courses

Here again, my focus is on the General Education courses in theology. For the most part, the courses that Religion and Theology majors take are generally met with higher interest levels and the smaller class sizes are more conducive to group discussion, with its lively give and take between teacher and students. What follows, however, can be applicable to both the majors and general education courses.

The first consideration is to have a clear outline of the course goals and requirements in the syllabus (course description), and a readable and interesting textbook(s). These, combined with a high degree of personal enthusiasm and conviction on the part of the teacher, are absolutely essential. But as to specific classroom strategies, I am more and more seeking to “put the ball into the court” of the students. In this regard, the key strategy involves raising the right questions which can pique interest and set the agenda for a sustained and serious pursuit of

satisfying answers.

Once again, as in the ethics class, I will devote a number of weeks of the semester to raising the key questions, laying out any important historical considerations for the manner in which the doctrine(s) have developed, and suggesting key perspectives which have shaped the understanding and biblical clarification of the “what” of the doctrine under consideration. In other words, I will role model how to hack out the basic biblical and logical components of a relevant doctrine and then proceed to the “so what” questions.

This “so what” phase and its strategy involves sustained reflection on the critical and analytical meaning of the doctrine. When this phase of the course has been completed, then it will be the students’ turn to prepare and present the fruits of their cooperative teamwork. To prepare them for the task, I will proceed to lay out some suggestions as to how to search for satisfying answers to the “what” of the doctrine and what it means to do sustained reflection on the “so what” of their particular doctrinal issue. Depending on the size of the class, the number of team members can vary from two to four. The process will climax with the team presentations to the class which will then be followed by class discussion led by the team (with supplemental participation by the teacher).

The last two to three weeks of the class should be reserved for the teacher, with plenty of opportunity for student input, to have an opportunity to seek to pull the loose ends together.

Concluding Theological/Pedagogical Considerations

The basic practical rationale of this more class-centered approach is the priesthood of all believers. “Post-modern” students might be immature, but they are not mere children. And the

only way that they are going to develop an appetite for theological “meat,” is to learn to cook it for themselves under the guidance of an experienced “chef.”

The next rationale is that the “post-modern” mind will be best reached through an exposition of practical truth which unfolds in the setting of Trinitarian orthodoxy, the Protestant *solas*, Wesleyan Arminianism, and Adventist “Pioneer” teachings.

But the final rationale lies in this question: what is the central, substantive theological rational of “Pioneer” Adventist theology which gives it pedagogical power to make sense of human existence?

I am convinced that the *material* or *substantive* heart of this theology is *formally* revealed in the Bible.⁸ Thus the initial goal is to inspire the students to do genuine biblical theology. But what do we mean we say “biblical theology?”

Robert Jenson seems to have gotten at the quintessential framework of biblical theology when he suggests that it involves “realistic narrative.” He persuasively suggests that this “narrative” has two characteristics: 1) “sequential events are understood jointly to make a certain kind of sense----a dramatic kind of sense,” and 2) “sequential dramatic coherence is of a sort that could ‘really’ happen, i.e., happen in a presumed factual world ‘out there,’ external to the (biblical) text.” Jenson then proceeds to suggest that the derived “coherence” would point to the

⁸Once again, we are using some technical terms which have a fairly precise meaning: *material* or *substantive* have reference to the actual content or inherent force of the truth of Scripture which is self-authenticating to the human heart and mind. The expression *formal* or *formally* has reference to a formal norming role of Scripture as an acknowledge authority in settling questions in dispute. Maybe it could be put this way: one can speak of some person as a standard or authority on cooking, but the real proof is to actually partake of the person’s cuisine. The homey proverb, “the proof is in the pudding,” best expresses *materially* or *substantively* that it is in the eating of the good pudding of said chef that we give authority to the chef as a culinary standard setter or *normative* authority.

“appropriate way to understand our human task and possibility.” Leslie Newbigin supplements this idea with the observation that “if there is no point in the story as a whole, there is no point in my own action. If the story is meaningless, any action of mine is meaningless” (Jenson and Newbigin are cited in Garber 143).

Adventist theology has an almost instinctive resonance with the insights of Jenson and Newbigin. We are firmly convinced that being biblical includes not just getting together all of the key texts on any given theological subject or theme; but it also involves careful interpretation in the setting of apocalyptic, Sanctuary imagery and the meta-narrative of the “Great Controversy” theme. For Adventist, however, the narrative is not primarily about Lucifer and His rebellion, the Fall of Humanity and the ultimate restoration of peace and justice in the universe.

The centerpiece which drives this whole narrative is the nature or character of God’s love—especially its manifestations in the life, teachings, death, burial, resurrection, and heavenly intercession of Jesus. It is in the context of the “love story” of the Person and work of Jesus that the key theological contributions and perspectives of Ellen White come into play. And this powerful portrayal of the unfolding of God’s love will profoundly illuminate each doctrine with an alluring and fruitful significance.

As was mentioned earlier, the quintessential exposition of this meta-narrative of divine love comes to its most moving and comprehensive (though condensed) expression in the chapter from *The Desire of Ages* entitled “It is Finished” (see especially pp. 761-63).

For Ellen White, God’s love was comprehensively expressed at the Cross and included two key components: a wonderfully balanced unfolding of 1) justice and 2) mercy.

Most certainly, divine love’s primary “calling card” is an enduring mercy. But it is quite

easy for mercy to degenerate into some form of soupy or senile indulgence. Therefore, if love is to be truly merciful, it must be ultimately conditioned by a flinty justice. On the other hand, flinty justice can easily degenerate into cold vengeance or harsh “Pharisaism.” But at the cross, and in its subsequent redemptive developments, the love of God has been steadily revealed as a wonderful balance of justice and mercy. And it is only in the light of this revelation that a full solution to the sin problem is manifest. And it is out of this redeeming love that we are confronted with the genius of the Trinitarian contributions to the Adventist theological pilgrimage.

Quite possibly it could be expressed like this: the more distinctive doctrines of “Pioneer” Adventism’s “Present Truth” “Pillars” (also called the “Landmarks”) are mainly about the justice of God’s love; whereas the major contribution of the “Eternal Verities” was a strong accenting of the mercy of gracious love.

The early “Pioneers” had become stout defenders of the law (both moral and physical, i.e. “health reform”), proclaimers of the judgment that all will have to face (both pre-Advent and then at the Glorious Appearing). The Sabbath was to be observed, not so much experienced as sacred time for communion with God and with one another. The millennium was more about the Devil getting his due rather than God giving clear views of redemptive strategies and decisions. Ellen White said that we had preached “the law until we had become as dry as the hills of Gilboa, which had neither dew nor rain.”(White, *Review and Herald Articles*).

This justice emphasis had led to a style of preaching which consisted mostly of what the Adventist prophetess called “theoretical discourses” that were typically framed in a debating style. And most tragic of all, this was done to the exclusion of any Christ-centered emphasis on

what Ellen White called “practical godliness” (White, *Gospel Workers* 158, 159).⁹ It was not that she wanted to do away with the doctrinal and theoretical aspects or totally neglect the justice of God. There was simply a palpable lack of Christo-centric grace which would suffuse the doctrinal essentials with the merciful side of love divine.

Both James and Ellen White began to sense that a new element needed to be interjected into the teachings and experience of the hard-working “Remnant.” This pained concern began to unfold in the last years of James White (1878–1881) and came to full fruition in the ministry of the widowed Ellen White in the 1880s and 90s.

At the General Conference of 1883, she commenced to sound a strong message of merciful grace. This was the period that climaxed with the great revival of “righteousness by faith” and a clear accenting of the primacy of justification by grace through faith alone. The atoning death of Christ as a merciful sacrifice for the sins of the world became the keynote of her writing and speaking ministry. Especially in the aftermath of the Minneapolis General Conference of 1888, she would exalt the crucified One as the great channel of the love of God for a doomed world.

Furthermore, not only did this period feature the uplifted Christ and His merciful, justifying grace, but it also witnessed a somewhat protracted, steady advance in the recovery of the doctrines of the full deity of Christ and the Personhood of the Holy Spirit. In other words, a Trinitarian yeast was being instilled into the Adventist understanding of salvation, theological reflection, doctrinal proclamation and personal Christian experience (including both piety and

⁹This expression refers to the steps to reconciliation with God and a life of effective witness and service.

ethics).

I have come to more clearly understand that if Christians are to begin to get a handle on the love of God, it will have to flow from the “heavenly trio” (Ellen White’s terminology, *Evangelism* 116) who have been sharing a divine love-fest from all eternity. This love had permeated the very fabric of human consciousness at the creation of the world, but was deeply compromised through the Fall. Yet the Triune God was not to hindered: divine mercy has shone forth in redemptive actions as the great “Salvation Plan” was set in motion. The heart of this “Plan” has been unfolded in the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension, enthronement, and priestly intercession of the Son of God.

Thus it should come as no surprise that when Adventism began to proclaim its “Present Truth” in the light of the Trinitarian love which flows from Calvary and its reflections from the High Priest of the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary, there was a new element brought into the work. Those doctrines, which had been primarily viewed as conveying justice, were now seen as also fused with mercy. Not surprisingly, a new note of hopefulness was featured in the proclamation of the Blessed Hope.

The key issue of all issues in thinking theologically is the issue of Triune love. I am determined to press this perspective with ever greater persistence. The pedagogical and theological imperative is to clarify what we mean when we speak of the love of God. To truly live in love is to live more abundantly. But what does this mean? The only answer which makes any biblical (or practical) sense is found in the divine mercy and justice which was revealed in the cross of Christ. Here is where the great provisions for human redemption and divine vindication were made and it is from Calvary that the dynamics of righteousness by faith can be

more clearly understood.

The persistent question which I press upon the students is to reckon each doctrine, each practice, each standard and every ethical demand in the light of the arresting narrative of Triune love as it has been unfolded at Cross of Christ and in salvation by faith alone in merits and grace of Christ. If any doctrine, practice, or moral demand cannot be informed by or more clearly inform the Trinitarian love of God, it should be re-considered, possibly side-tracked, or simply dropped. If the love revealed at the cross and appropriated through salvation by faith alone is not in the teaching or practice, it is not worth the time or effort for either the teacher or the student.

In the exposition of these themes there inheres the resources for the most satisfying illumination of every other Christian doctrine (including Adventist “Present Truth” distinctives) and the shaping of world-views, values, life perspectives, and ethics. This story of the unfolding of the Triune God’s just and merciful love is a meta-narrative which is uniquely coherent and fruitful. It is the Gospel of Jesus Christ in verity!!! What better avenue with which to arrest “post-moderns” college students? Let’s slay them with love bullets!!!!

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