

# **The Personality of God**

**by D.M. Canright**



**1878**

**Revised with the Personal Assistance of Ellen and James White**

**Introduction:**

by Trent Wilde

The phrase “The Personality of God” was used by early Seventh-day Adventists to refer to their distinct doctrine of God. In the period immediately following the Great Disappointment, this was among the earliest doctrines that united those who would go on to found the SDA denomination; it preceded even the Sabbath. The earliest known expression of it is found in a vision of Ellen White in February 1845. Here it is in her own words:

In February, 1845, I had a vision of events commencing with the Midnight Cry. I saw a throne and on it sat the Father and the Son. I gazed on Jesus' countenance and admired his lovely *person*. *The Father's person I could not behold, for a cloud of glorious light covered him. I asked Jesus if his Father had a form like himself. He said he had, but I could not behold it, for said he if you should once behold the glory of his person you would cease to exist...* {Broadside1 April 6, 1846, par. 7}

In the years that followed, the SDA pioneers would write many articles on the *personality* of God, showing from the Scriptures that God is a person having body, parts, and passions and that his body's form is revealed in humanity, we being made in his physical image. They explicitly rejected the notion that God is an immaterial spirit beyond the bounds of time and space and argued instead for a strictly materialistic view of God. As is evidenced by their books and periodicals, the SDA people were firmly united on this doctrine for the first 50 years. The first steps away from it were taken in the 1890s when J.H. Kellogg and others began to represent God as an intelligence transcending a localized body and pervading nature. As these spiritualistic sentiments gained prominence, Ellen White raised her voice and pen in opposition. To

Kellogg, she wrote,

You are not definitely clear on *the personality of God, which is everything to us as a people*. You have virtually destroyed the Lord God Himself. - *Ellen White to J.H. Kellogg, March 16, 1903*

And to A.G. Daniells, then president of the General Conference, she wrote,

Extreme views of "God in nature" undermine *the foundation truths* of the personality of God and the ministration of angels. - *Ellen White to A.G. Daniells, Sep. 18, 1903*

She wrote later,

Those who seek to remove the old landmarks are not holding fast; they are not remembering how they have received and heard. Those who try to bring in theories that would remove *the pillars of our faith* concerning the sanctuary, or concerning *the personality of God* or of Christ, are working as blind men...

When men come in who would move one pin or pill from *the foundation* which God has established by His Holy Spirit, let the aged men who are were *pioneers* in our work speak plainly, and let those who are dead speak also by reprinting of their articles in our periodicals. - Ms62, 1905.14, 20 (May 24)

In these statements, Ellen White clearly speaks of the early SDA doctrine of the Personality of God as a foundation and pillar of our faith. It is clear that early SDAs understood it since she said it was everything to them as a people and that it can be found in the writings of the pioneers. Since most Seventh-day Adventists today are unaware that our people had a distinct doctrine of the personality of God, much less that this doctrine is a pillar and foundation of our faith, it is certainly time that we

reprint the articles of the pioneers on this subject.

The following pages contain a series of articles written by Dudley Canright and published in *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* across four consecutive issues from August 29 – September 19, 1878. While Canright would later turn from Adventism, at the time of writing these articles (and for nearly a decade afterward), he was recognized as one of the ablest expositors of the SDA message. A comparison of these articles with those of other early SDAs makes plain that they are not the product of his own idiosyncratic perspectives; rather, they represent the position of the SDAs as a people. They were clearly inspired by an earlier series of articles (later turned into a pamphlet) by the same name written by James White in 1861. Furthermore, James and Ellen White were personally involved in helping Canright revise an earlier version of these articles to produce the articles that follow. James announced this in the *Review and Herald* in the issue immediately preceding Canright's series. Here is what James said,

Mrs. White had an appointment to speak in the Colorado tent at Boulder City, on the evening of the 11<sup>th</sup>, so in the morning we took Elder Canright to the place with us ... On our journey to this State, and for the first few weeks after our arrival, we needed his assistance, and he has acted the part of a true Christian brother. We have had many precious seasons of prayer together at the family altar, and when bowed together in the evergreen groves of the mountains. Here we have, after prayer and careful deliberation, decided very important matters pertaining to the cause. And here, too, we have assisted him in the revision of his very valuable work entitled, "The Bible from Heaven," and his articles on *the Personality of God*, the Divinity of Christ, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to be published in pamphlet form; while he assisted us on some important works. - James White, [The Review and Herald, August 22, 1878](#), p. 68

As was often done prior to publishing a pamphlet, they first published the material in the Review. This is what they did beginning in the next issue. Here are all four articles. At the beginning of each, I've included the title as found in the original as well as a link to a scan of the original.

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## THE PERSONALITY OF GOD

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*By Elder D. M. Canright*

([The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, Aug. 29, 1878](#))

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Text: "But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things." 1. Cor. 8:6.

There is but one true and living God. He is eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, just, holy, and worthy of all praise and worship. He is the Creator of all things, visible and invisible, of the heavens and of the earth. No one who reads the Old Testament can fail to notice that this is the great burden of those writings; viz., to set forth and enforce in every possible manner, and on every occasion, the great fact that there is but one true God, and that he is a living, conscious, intelligent Being, possessed of feeling, affection, and sympathy. At the time when the Bible was written, nearly the whole world had adopted either Polytheism or Pantheism. Polytheism taught that there were many gods, even thousands of them. Athens is said to have thirty thousand gods. Rome had its gods, Greece had its gods, Egypt had its gods. Each was willing to allow that the others' gods were just as good as its own. Every nation, every city, and even every household, had its peculiar god. In opposition to this, Moses and the prophets set

forth the grand fact that this doctrine of many gods was a lie, and that there was only one God, Jehovah, the living God.

The doctrine of Pantheism at that time also prevailed largely. It teaches that everything is God,—the sun, the stars, the earth, water, fire,—everything. Put them all together and you have God. But this monstrous error the Bible denounces, and sets forth in its stead the truth,—that all these material things were created by a living, intelligent, personal Being, who is infinitely above them all. This doctrine is so plainly taught in the Bible that it is scarcely necessary to argue it at length. We will quote a few of the plainest scriptures upon this point, asking the reader to notice them particularly.

“Thou shalt have no other gods before me.” Ex. 20:3. All others were false.

“Unto thee it was showed that thou mightest know that the Lord he is god; there is none else beside him.” Deut. 4:35. This declaration is emphatic. There is no God beside the Lord.

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord.” Deut. 6:4. Here we strike the key-note of the doctrine of the Deity. “The Lord our God is ONE Lord.” Not many, not a thousand, not a hundred, not ten, not three, but only ONE,—one God.

“See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me.” Deut. 32:39.

“Thou art great, O Lord God; for there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee.” 2 Sam. 7:22.

“Thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; thou hast made heaven and earth.” 2 Kings 19:15.

This one God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth.

“Thou, even thou, art Lord alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all.” Neh. 9:6.

“For thou art great, and doest wondrous things; thou art God alone.” Ps. 86:10.

“Before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me.” Isa. 43:10. This is very strong language. “Before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me.”

“I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God. . . . Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any.” Isa. 44:6, 8.

“I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me.” Isa. 45:5.

“I am God, and there is none else.” Verse 22. No comments of ours can make these declarations plainer. There is just one eternal God and no more,—one who is the Author and Father of all things.

Turning to the New Testament, we find the same doctrine taught just as plainly as in the Old. Neither Moses nor the prophets ever set forth the unity of God more strongly than Jesus himself. He taught it and reiterated it many times. Thus he says: “The first of all commandments is, Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and thou shalt love the Lord they God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul. . . . And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth; for there is one God; and there is none other but he.” Mark 12:29-32.

The scribe said, “There is one God, and there is none other but he.” To this declaration Jesus assented. “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” John 17:3. Jesus says his Father is the only true God. “But Trinitarians contradict this by saying that the Son and Holy Ghost are just as much the true God as the Father is. Now were I, on going into a place, to inquire for a minister of the gospel, and one were to inform me that Roger Roe was the only minister of the gospel in the place, and another were to tell me that two other persons were just as truly ministers of the gospel as

Elder Roe, surely the latter would contradict the former. And precisely so do Trinitarians contradict the Saviour in this text."

"There is none other God but one. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth (as there be gods many, and lords many); but to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him." 1 Cor. 8:4-6.

Says the great apostle, "There is none other God but one," and "there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things." He tells us who this one God is. It is not the Holy Ghost; it is not Jesus Christ, but it is the Father. Gal. 3:20; 1 Tim. 1:17. There is, then, only one wise God. 1 Tim. 2:5; Deut. 6:4. Those who are familiar with the Bible will see that I have selected only a few of the plainest texts upon this doctrine. How the doctrine of the trinity, of three Gods, can be reconciled with these positive statements I do not know. It seems to me that nothing can be framed which more clearly denies the doctrine of the trinity, than do the scriptures above quoted.

And then the Bible never uses the phrases, "trinity," "triune God," "three in one," "the holy three," "God the Holy Ghost," etc. But it does emphatically say there is only one God, the Father. And every argument of the Trinitarian to prove three Gods in one person, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, all of them of one substance, and every way equal to each other, and all three forming but one, contradicts itself, contradicts reason, and contradicts the Bible. Any one who is familiar with the teachings of Trinitarians will readily see that we do not at all misrepresent them in the following statements:—

1. They place the Father first in the trinity, and the Son second, and the Holy Spirit third. If they are all equal, why do this?

2. They have a mediator between men and the Father, but not



between men and the Son or the Holy Spirit. Then they do not themselves regard them as equals.

3. The Son prays, but the Father does not.

4. The Son has a body, but neither the Father nor the Spirit has, according to them.

5. The Son died, but neither the Father nor the Spirit have seen death.

6. They do not pray to the Son in the name of the Father, as they do to the Father in the name of the Son.

7. The Father does not plead with the Son, as the Son does with the Father.

8. They do not offer any sacrifice to the Holy Ghost, as they do to the Father.

9. Their continual effort to prove the Son equal with the Father is virtually proof that he is not. They never try to prove the Father equal with the Son.

According to Trinitarians,—

10. Greater and less imply perfect equality. "My Father is greater than I." John 14:28.

11. The Sender and Sent are both one. "Thou didst send me." John 17:8.

12. The self-existent God has a Father. John 20:17.

13. The expressions one and three mean the same. Eph. 4:6.

14. The Father and Son are the same. Matt. 3:17.

15. Christ prayed to himself.

16. Jesus was that Father who sent him.

17. He was that God who gave him.

18. They teach that God sent himself, came out of himself, prayed to himself, thanked himself, bore witness of himself, went back to himself, sits at the right hand of himself, is his own Father and his own Son, pleads with himself, left Heaven, and was there all the time.

19. Jesus is very God and very man.
20. He is the invisible God, but was often seen.
21. He is the immortal God, but he died.
22. He is the omnipotent God, but an angel strengthened him.
23. He is the omniscient God, but did not know the day and hour of his appearing. Mark 13:32.
24. He is equal with the Father, and yet is the Father.
25. He is the Son, but is as old as the Father.
26. He is as great as his Father, though his Father is greater than he. John 14:28.
27. He is the begotten Son, and the unbegotten God.
28. He has a Father, and is the God who has no Father.
29. Divinity and humanity were united, never to be divided (so say the creeds), yet the divinity forsook the humanity on the cross.
30. They are never to be divided; yet one was dead, the other living.
31. God has no body, yet "he took again his body." - Creeds.
32. God is eternal, but was "begotten before all worlds."
33. The Son has a Father, but the Father has no Father.
34. The Father has a Son, but the Son has no Son.
35. God never gives thanks, but the Son does.
36. The Father is never second, but the Son always is.
37. God does not receive his power from another, but the Son does.
38. The Father was never crucified, never forsaken by his God, and did not receive his life from another, but all this is true of the Son.

Trinitarian creeds contradict the word of God thus:—Creeds Say:

CREEDS SAY:

1. Trinity
2. Triune.

BIBLE SAYS:

- God Gen. 1:1  
One.

|                                                                              |                                                                         |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3. God is three.                                                             | God is one. Gal. 3:20                                                   |
| 4 God is three Lords.                                                        | God is one Lord Deut. 6:3                                               |
| 5. His name is three.                                                        | His name is one. Zech. 14:9.                                            |
| 6. Holy three.                                                               | Holy one. Isa. 12:6                                                     |
| 7. God the Spirit.                                                           | The Spirit of God. Gen. 1:2                                             |
| 8. God died for us.                                                          | The Son of God died. Matt<br>27:54                                      |
| 9. Worship the Trinity.                                                      | Worship God. Rev. 22:9                                                  |
| 10. When ye pray say, "Holy<br>Trinity." -Ep. Pr. Book.                      | When ye pray say, "Our<br>Father." Luke 11:2                            |
| 11. The Son and the Holy<br>Ghost are as much the true God<br>as the Father. | Father, "that they might<br>know thee, the ONLY true God."<br>John 17:3 |
| 12. Christ is equal with God.                                                | "My Father is greater than I."<br>John 14:28                            |

The Bible says nothing about the trinity. God never mentions it, Jesus never named it, the apostles never did. Now men dare to call God Trinity, Triune, etc. It is a great thing to name our God. We may name our horse, our child; but who presumes to name God? The child should not name its father. We should not name God.

God is self-existent, and the source and author of all things,—of angels, of men, of all the worlds,—of everything. Thus Paul says, "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things; to whom be glory forever. Amen." Rom. 11:36.

He is the source of all life and immortality. Thus, speaking of the Father, Paul says, "Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto." 1 Tim. 6:16. Notice that this glorious God is the only one who, in himself, possesses immortality. That is, he is the fountain-head, the source of all life and immortality. Even Jesus Christ, the Son of God, derives his existence and his life from the Father, for so he himself says, "As

the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father, so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me." John 6:57. "For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself." John 5:26. This statement is unequivocal. The Father has life in himself, and in his great love for his Son he bestows the same gift upon him; but it will be noticed that the Father is the one from whom the gift came.

In harmony with this, the apostle says, "But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him." 1 Cor. 8:6. How carefully Paul distinguishes between the Father and the Son. He says, "The Father, *of whom* are all things," and "Jesus Christ, *by whom* are all things." The Father is the source of everything. Jesus is the one through whom all things are done. All the authority, the glory, and the power of Christ he received from his Father. It was given to him, he had it not in himself. "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in Heaven and in earth." Matt. 28:18. A belief in this doctrine is very important. Indeed, it cannot be too strongly insisted upon. Jesus even declares that the knowledge of this truth is necessary to eternal life. "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." John 17:3.

We must know the Father as the only true God. Then there is no true God besides the Father. But we must also know his Son Jesus Christ, whom he has sent. How simple and plain is this doctrine, and how abundantly sustained by the Holy Bible.

*(To be continued.)*

## The Personality of God

## THE PERSONALITY OF GOD

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By Elder D. M. Canright

(Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald, Sep. 5, 1878)

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(Continued.)

## GOD IS A REAL PERSON.

*God is a real person, having a body, form, and local habitation. Man is made in his image.* The God of the Bible is not a mere principle, an essence or soul of the universe, but he is a real, personal being, having a body, form, shape, and local habitation, a throne, etc. But let us listen first to what the creeds say of him. The Methodist Discipline, in its articles of religion, Art. 1, says:—

“There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body or parts.”

The articles of faith of the Episcopal church are even worse. Art. 1 says:—

“There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions.” Other creeds go still further, and say that he is without center or circumference. In all candor, I submit that such a description of God annihilates him entirely. He has no body, no parts, no passions, dwells nowhere in particular, has no center, no circumference. If a man were called upon to describe a nonentity, he could not do it more perfectly than it is done in the above language.

But notice further, these same creeds teach that Jesus Christ is the very and eternal God. Thus Art. 2 of the Episcopal creed says:—

“The Son, which is the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father, the very and eternal God, of one substance with the Father,” etc. Now notice that this Son of God is

the very and eternal God himself. And then it continues: "took man's nature in the womb of the blessed virgin, of her substance, so that two whole and perfect natures, that is to say the Godhead and manhood, were joined together in one person, never to be divided, whereof is one Christ, very God and very man."

Art. 4 says:—

"Christ did truly rise again from the dead, and took again his body, with flesh, bones, and all things pertaining to the perfection of man's nature, wherewith he ascended into Heaven, and there sitteth until he return to judge all men at the last day."

Several queries present themselves here: Is Christ the very and eternal God? So they say. Did Christ have a body? This they positively affirm. Is he inseparably connected with that body? And has he not that body in Heaven? This they plainly declare. Is he not the true God? So they say. Then has not the true God a body? Thus the creed directly says. Then certainly God has a body—occupies a body. Why, then, do the creeds say that he has no body?

Again we are told by these creeds that God is everywhere, as much in one place as another, and no more in one place than another. But the Bible says that Jesus ascended up on high, and is at the right hand of the Father. Did he ascend everywhere? Was his body divided into innumerable particles, and scattered throughout the universe? If the Father is everywhere and nowhere in particular, where did Jesus go? Again it is claimed that saints at death go to Heaven, where God is. Do they go everywhere and nowhere in particular? All this seems to me to be the sheerest nonsense. It is opposed to common sense and to the Bible. No; God is a person, a real being.

I do not believe that any person, whatever his creed may be, ever prays to God without conceiving of him as having a body, form, and shape, and being located upon a throne in Heaven.

When he closes his eyes upon the world and begins to pray to God, he immediately looks up to Heaven by faith, and beholds God upon his throne in the form of a man, and prays to him as such. Nor is this merely imaginary. The Bible has everywhere so described him; and it is from those oft-repeated descriptions that these ideas are formed. Then either the whole tenor of the Bible misleads us, or else our position is true.

Furthermore, how could a person pray with any intelligence to a mere essence, a mere principle, an immaterial spirit, that had no body, parts, or shape, that was just as much in one place as in another? The idea is absurd. Then, again, what the Bible says of going to God and coming from God takes for granted that he is a personal being, located in a definite place. Let us read a few scriptures.

“Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father; but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.” John 20:17. Jesus said that he was about to ascend to God.

“Then Jesus saith unto them, Yet a little while I am with you, and then I go unto Him that sent me.” John 7:33. “And her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.” Rev. 12:5. To Cornelius the angel said, “Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.” Acts 10:4.

Hundreds of texts like these occur throughout the Bible; but they would neither be true nor sensible if God is a mere essence, an immaterial spirit, as much in one place as another. How many times we read in the Bible of angels coming from God. Jesus says of himself, “I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me.” John 8:42. “Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God,” John 13:3. “I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world; again, I leave the world, and

go to the Father.” John 16:28.

This last text is very expressive. “I came forth from the Father,” says Jesus, “and am come into the world; again, I leave the world, and go to the Father.” Is the Father, then, just as much in the world as anywhere? If so, how could Christ come forth from the Father by coming into the world, and again go to the Father by leaving the world? No; the Father is just as much a personal being as a man is. He has a personal presence. Thus Gabriel says, “I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God.” Luke 1:19. Then God has an immediate presence which is not everywhere. Where did Gabriel come from? He came directly from Heaven. Is the presence of God everywhere? How, then, could Gabriel say that he stood in the presence of God more than any one else? True, there is one sense in which God is everywhere. We will notice this by and by. Again: “I say unto you, that in Heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in Heaven.” Matthew 18:10. Here, again, it is said that the angels in Heaven behold the face of the Father. Then how many scores and hundreds of times it is declared in the most emphatic and unmistakable language that God is in Heaven, and not upon earth. Says the wise man, “God is in Heaven, and thou upon earth.” Eccl. 5:2. Our Saviour taught his disciples to pray, “Our Father which art in Heaven.” Matt. 6:9. Why say, “Which art in Heaven,” if he is as much in the earth, and in the sea, and everywhere, as he is in Heaven?

Furthermore, it is many times positively declared that he sits upon a throne in Heaven. We will read a few passages. “The Lord hath prepared his throne in the Heavens.” Ps. 103:19. “The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord’s throne is in Heaven.” Ps. 11:4.

“In the year that King Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphim; each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with



twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." Isa. 6:1-3. How explicit is this text. The prophet saw the Lord sitting upon a throne. He describes that throne, and the angels standing by it, and tells what the angels said.

So Jesus says, "And he that shall swear by Heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon." Matt. 23:22. Then the throne of God is in Heaven, and God sets upon that throne. Is the throne of God everywhere? Is it on this earth? Is it in America? Is it in the State of New York? Is it in the city of Rochester? No; but it is in Heaven, and God sits upon it.

In Rev. 4:2-5 we read:—

"And immediately I was in the Spirit; and, behold, a throne was set in Heaven, and one sat on the throne. And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone; and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald. And round about the throne were four and twenty seats; and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold. And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices; and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God." Indeed, we might read on through the whole chapter. It is a minute description of the throne of God, of God's person, of angels, and of the living creatures around that throne. If all this is denied, one might as well deny the whole Bible.

Once more: "After this I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about

the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and feel before the throne on their faces, and worshiped God." "Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple, and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them." Rev. 7:9-11, 15.

This is in strict harmony with all the Scriptures, and it is also in harmony with common sense.

It is declared that God sits between the cherubim. "The Lord reigneth; let the people tremble: he sitteth between the cherubim; let the earth be moved." Ps. 99:1. "Then said he, These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth." Zech. 4:14.

The Scriptures describe God as a person, having a form, the shape of a man. Daniel, in his vision of God, describes him thus: "I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of Days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool." Dan. 7:9. God is here described as having a head and hair.

Ezekiel, in his vision of the throne of God, says:—

"And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it; and I saw as the colour of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about, as the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord." Eze. 1:26-28. "This is the living creature that I saw under the God of Israel by the river of Chebar." Eze. 10:20.

To Moses the Lord said:—

“Thou canst not see my face; for there shall no man see me, and live. And the Lord said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock; and it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by; and I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts; but my face shall not be seen.” Ex. 33:20-23. No man can see the Lord’s face. Then he has a face. But he said, I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and I will pass by, and thou shalt see my back parts, and he did so. Now was this all a farce, a deception? Did the Lord deceive Moses, and make him think he had a face, and hands, and parts, when he had none? No, indeed. Then God has parts, notwithstanding the creeds say he is without body or parts.

Again we read: “Then went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and they saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness. And upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand: also they saw God, and did eat and drink.” Ex. 24:9-11. Here it is positively declared that they saw the God of Israel, it tells what was under his feet, and how he looked. They saw his shape and form, but did not see his face, for God has said that no man should see his face and live.

All through the Scriptures God is described as being in the form of man. Thus, he is said to have a head, and hairs of his head, Dan. 7:9; and hands, Ex. 33:22; feet, Ex. 24:10; loins, Eze. 1:27; face, Matt. 18:10; heart, Gen. 6:6; parts, Ex. 33:23; a form, Phil. 2:6; shape, John 5:37; person, Heb. 1:3; soul, Jer. 5:9; and spirit, Matt. 12:28. Thus it is declared that God has all the members and parts of a perfect man. This is not said once, nor twice, but many times, not in parables and symbols, and figures, but directly and

plainly.

*(To be continued.)*

## THE PERSONALITY OF GOD

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*By Elder D. M. Canright*

(The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, Sep. 12, 1878)

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*(Continued.)*

GOD IS A REAL PERSON.—CONCLUDED.

Another convincing proof that God is a real person, having a form and parts, is the fact that man is said to have been made in the image of God.

“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; . . . so God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.” Gen. 1:26, 27. If man was made in the image and likeness of God, then we know how God looks, what shape he has; he is in the shape of man. A poor evasion is attempted here, by asserting that it is the spirit of man that is in the image of God. But the text says no such thing. It says, “Let us make man in our image.” Then we are told how this was done: “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground.” Gen. 2:7. Of what did God form man? It is directly said that he was formed of the dust of the ground. Very well; then that which was formed of the dust of the ground is in the image of God, Gen. 9:6 confirms this fact: “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God made he man.”

If a man killed a beast, was he to die for that? No; but if he

shed the blood of a man he must die. The reason is stated: "For in the image of God made he man," *i.e.*, he has killed and destroyed that which is made in the image of God. Now the question is, What has he killed? Not an immortal spirit or soul, but the body, that which had blood, that which was in the image of God. Hence it is the body which is in the image of God.

The words image and likeness are thus defined by Webster:—

"Image, *n.* 1. A representation or similitude of any person or thing formed of a material substance; as, an image wrought out of stone, wood, or wax. 2. A statue." Its meaning is plain. It is a representation of something else in the same form. "Likeness, *n.* Resemblance in form; similitude. The picture is a good likeness of the original. 2. Resemblance; form; external appearance. 3. One that resembles another; a copy; a counterpart." Plainly, then, an image or likeness is that which is in the form of, and looks like, that which it is to represent. Man is in the image and likeness of God; hence God has a body in form like that of a man.

Let us now turn to the Bible, and find the meaning of the word *image* as it is there used. It will be found that every time it refers to something that has a form, a real substance, a shape.

"Ye shall make you no idols nor graven image, neither rear you up a standing image of stone in your land, to bow down unto it; for I am the Lord your God." Lev. 26:1. "And Michal took an image, and laid it in the bed." 1 Sam. 19:13. "And he set a carved image, the idol which he had made, in the house of God." 2 Chron. 33:7. "Thou, O king, sawest, and behold a great image. This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof was terrible." Dan. 2:31. "Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof six cubits." Dan. 3:1. "And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription?" Matt. 22:20. "Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of

the Ephesians is a worshiper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter?" Acts 19:35. "I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal." Rom. 11:4. "Saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live." Rev. 13:14. "Wherefore ye shall make images of your emerods, and images of your mice that mar the land." 1 Sam. 6:5. "For when she saw men portrayed upon the wall, the images of the Chaldeans portrayed with vermilion." Eze. 23:14. "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth." Ex. 20:4.

All these texts abundantly show that in Bible language an image is something that has a real form and shape. Man is made in the image of God—the man that was made of the dust, too. Gen. 2:7.

"God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." Rom. 8:3.

Here it is definitely stated what part of man constitutes the likeness. "Sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh." It is his flesh, then, in which the likeness consist. Phil. 2:5-8 is absolutely decisive upon this point. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God." Here we stop to ask how Christ could be in the form of God, if God had no form. But Jesus was in the form of God; hence the argument is conclusive that God has a form. "Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant [man], and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself," etc. Here it is declared that Christ was in the form of God, in the form of a servant, in the likeness of

man, in the fashion of man. We know that this was his body; for Christ was both in the form of God, and in the form of man. Then God and man both have the same form.

Of Jesus Paul says, "Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person." Heb. 1:3. It is the person of God, then, of which Jesus was the image. Then God has a person. Now what is the meaning of the word *person*? It seems that on so simple a word as this there could be no mistake. It does not and cannot mean an immaterial, intangible, shapeless, formless essence. It always means an intelligent being, having a body, shape, and form.

Again we appeal to the word of God. Let us carefully read a few plain scriptures where the word *person* is used; and it will be seen that it always means an individual with an organized shape and form.

"Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself." Gen. 14:21. "And a clean person shall take the hyssop, and dip it in the water, and sprinkle it upon the tent, and upon all the vessels, and upon the persons that were there." Num. 19:18. And he "slew his brethren the sons of Jerubbaal, being threescore and ten persons." Judges 9:5.

"I have seen a son of Jesse, . . . a comely person." 1 Sam. 16:18. "And Doeg the Edomite turned, and he fell upon the priests, and slew on that day fourscore and five persons that did wear a linen ephod." 1 Sam 22:18. "Wicked men have slain a righteous person in his own house upon his bed." 2 Sam. 4:11. "That thou go to battle in thine own person." 2 Sam 17:11. "Likewise the fool and the brutish person perish." Ps. 49:10. "There was not one feeble person among their tribes." Ps. 105:37. "A man that doeth violence to the blood of any person shall flee to the pit." Prov. 28:17. "And every person that Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had left." Jer. 43:6. "He carried away captive from Jerusalem eight hundred

thirty and two persons." Jer. 52:29. "Thou wast cast out in the open field, to the loathing of thy person, in the day that thou wast born." Eze. 16:5. "And they shall come at no dead person." Eze. 44:25. "For thou regardest not the person of men." Matt. 22:16. "I am innocent of the blood of this just person." Matt. 27:24. "Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person." 1 Cor. 5:14. "But saved Noah the eighth person." 2 Pet. 2:5.

By these passages we find what the Bible means by the word person. It never means a being without body, parts or passions. Now the Bible, after using the word person hundreds of times in the sense indicated above, says that God is a person. We believe it, and are willing to leave it there.

#### OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED.

However plain any doctrine may be, some will raise objections to it. So objections are urged against the real personality of God; but they are very few and readily answered.

1. *God fills Heaven and earth.* "Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? Saith the Lord. Do not I fill Heaven and earth? saith the Lord." Jer. 23:23,24.

"Now," says one, "if God fills Heaven and earth, he must be everywhere, in one place as much as in another. And beside that, he cannot be a material being, having a body and form; for if he were, his body, filling Heaven and earth, would exclude all other bodies." It is strange that sensible men will raise so foolish an objection as this. Let us try their view of it. They say that God is an immaterial spirit and fills Heaven and earth. Very well; then this must exclude all other spirits; for just as truly as no two material bodies can occupy the same place at once, no two spirits can occupy the same place at the same time.

They reason that if God were a material being and filled



Heaven and earth, then he would exclude all other material beings from the universe. And their conclusion is right. So we reason just as legitimately that if God, as a spirit, absolutely and in the full sense of the word filled Heaven and earth, then he would exclude all other spirits, and there would be neither angels nor wicked spirits anywhere in the universe! But both of these conclusions we know to be untrue. What, then, is the truth? Simply this: That when the Lord says, I fill Heaven and earth, it is to be understood in a certain qualified sense, as explained by other scriptures. We must not make a single strong metaphor like this contradict the many direct declarations that God has a form, shape, body, and local habitation; that he sits upon a throne, and is in Heaven and not upon the earth. When God says he fills Heaven and earth, other scriptures explain this to mean that Heaven and earth, and all parts of the universe, are open and naked before the eyes of God, and that nothing is hid from his sight; that he sees everything just as clearly and distinctly as though it were in his immediate presence. The very text itself indicates this. Read it again carefully. "Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord." There is the point. No man can hide himself anywhere so that God cannot see him. With this thought the Lord adds, "Do not I fill Heaven and earth?" But how? absolutely, personally? No; for this is not true either in fact or in the teachings of the Bible. Read a few other scriptures. "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight; but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." Heb. 4:13. Here we have an explanation of what this means. All things are open and naked before the eyes of God. "Great in counsel, and mighty in work; for thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men, to give every one according to the fruit of his doings." Jer. 32:19. This states the same fact again: The eyes of the Lord "are upon all the ways of the sons of men."

Ps. 139:1-12 is a beautiful expression of this whole subject: "O lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my down-sitting and mine up-rising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassed my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into Heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee."

How beautifully the psalmist expresses the thought that God sees and knows all his ways, understands every word he speaks, knows his thoughts afar off; that neither in Heaven, in earth, nor in hell can he hide himself from God. The deepest darkness is as light as the day to God. God sees him everywhere and all the time. In this sense, and this only, is God everywhere present. Reader, is God personally present in the room where you now are? You know he is not. If he were you would not live a moment. Read what the Bible says of the wonderful majesty, the burning glory, the devouring fire which surround the immediate presence of the Almighty. Could you stand in such a presence? Whatever the creeds may say, in our very souls we know better.

2. *God is a spirit.* "God is a spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." John 4:24.

There, says the objector, if God is a spirit he cannot be a

material person, having a form and body. Who says that a spirit is not a person, and has no form, no body, no substance? That is all assumption. It assumes the very thing to be proved. We maintain that a living spirit is just as much as person as a man is, and has shape, body, and form. This we can readily prove. Angels are called spirits. "Are they not all ministering spirits?" Heb. 1:14. Yet these angels are real persons, as you know by the whole tenor of the Bible. Angels came to Abraham, sat in his tent, and ate of his bread. Gen. 18. Angels went to Lot, took hold of his hand, ate at his table. Gen. 19. Angels have bodies, wings, faces, hands, and feet. Isa. 6:1-4. They have frequently been seen, and conversations have been held with them. An angel came to Daniel. Gabriel came to Mary and to Elizabeth. One came to Peter in prison. John fell at the feet of an angel to worship him. Are they not persons? Do they not have form and shape? or are they simply an essence, filling the universe, being in no place in particular? Every Bible student knows better.

*(To be continued.)*

## THE PERSONALITY OF GOD

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*By Elder D. M. Canright*

(The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, Sep. 19, 1878)

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*(Continued.)*

## OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED.—CONCLUDED.

When Jesus Christ the Son of God came to this world, he was a real being, a person, having a body and form. Was he not a material being? We all know that he was. He ate, drank, and walked; he died upon the cross and was buried. Yet the Bible says he was a spirit, and that too while upon earth.

“And so it is written, The first Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam [Christ] was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from Heaven.” 1 Cor. 15:45-47.

Here it is declared that Christ, the second Adam, was made a quickening spirit. It will be noticed that this was said of Him who took man’s nature. Paul says, “The first man Adam was made a living soul, the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.” “The second man is the Lord from Heaven.” Then the man Christ Jesus was a spirit, for so the apostle says. This passage explains what is meant when a person is called a spirit. It means that he is a spiritual being, for thus it says, “Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural [Adam], and afterward that which is spiritual” (Christ). Paul says that Christ is a spirit, and explains a spirit to be a spiritual being. The apostle again says, “It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.” Verse 44.

This verse settles the question that there is a spiritual body,

and that it is a person, and not an immaterial, intangible essence. A being can be spiritual and have a body. Likewise God is a spirit and has a body. He is a spiritual being, and yet of bodily form and shape.

Christ is again called a spirit in 2 Cor. 3:17. Paul says, "Now the Lord is that spirit." If Christ was a spirit, and yet had a body and form, his Father can be a spirit and have a body and form.

But does not Jesus say that a spirit hath not flesh and bones? Luke 24:39. In this case the reference is to an apparition, or ghost. The disciples were terrified, and at first thought that they had seen a ghost, a mere specter. They themselves did not believe such an apparition to be real; hence Christ appeals to them that he is not such a spirit, for he has flesh and bones.

3. *God cannot be a material being.* It is urged that matter cannot think, move and act of itself; that it must first be organized and animated. Hence our opponents ask, if God is a material being, who organized him, who made him? But we hand this question back to them, If God is a spirit, who made him? Are not angels spirits? Are not devils spirits? Were not angels and devils created? Spirits were created as well as material beings. Even if we grant the distinction between matter and spirit that our spiritualizing friends claim, where is the proof that spirit is eternal any more than matter? Angels and devils are spiritual beings, but are just as distinct one from another as men are from one another. Neither are they eternal any more than men are. They were created, formed, organized.

Granting that their ideas of God as a pure immaterial spirit are correct, we ask them, Who created this spirit? And our question is just as fair as theirs, when they ask us, Who organized God if he was a material being? Neither party can answer these questions, simply because we know nothing about the matter. The atheist triumphantly asks the Christian, Who made God? but no one can

answer, from the simple fact that such questions are too high for mortal men. Job truly says: "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea." Job 11:7-9.

We utterly deny the distinction between matter and spirit which is claimed. We believe that all things are material, although matter may manifest itself in a great diversity of forms. The wisest and most scientific men freely admit that they know but little about matter. The more they study, the deeper they search into it, the stronger are their convictions that its different attributes and capabilities have been but partially understood. Because a certain fact is true of matter in one condition, it is argued that it must always be true of matter everywhere. This is illogical and false, for matter is capable of the greatest diversity. Matter in one form may even seem to be the direct opposite of the same matter in another form. For instance: I have before me a piece of ice. I put my hand upon it; it is exceedingly cold. I can cut it with a knife or saw it with a saw. It is solid. But I put this ice in a vessel and warm it, and it soon becomes water. Now it does not look at all like that piece of ice which was before me a few minutes before. I confine this water in a vessel and heat it very hot. It now becomes steam, a vapor, and is invisible. It is so hot it would scald your hand. It can neither be cut, nor poured from vessel to vessel. It now seems to be precisely opposite from that block of ice, and yet everybody knows that it is the very same matter, only in another condition. If we had not seen ice thus converted into steam, we would all pronounce such a change impossible; yet we all know by actual observation that ice, and water, and steam are only different conditions of the same material.

There is as great a difference between steam and ice as our

opponents claim there is between spirit and matter. We claim, therefore, that they cannot show that a spirit is not one form of matter. The Bible nowhere says it is not. On the other hand, we have plainly shown that it is. Consider further the wonderful diversity of matter. Before me lies a piece of very white paper; by its side lies a book which is black. These are opposite in color, but both material. Here is a cake of ice, there is a coal of fire; one is cold, the other hot, but both are material. Here is a ball of lead, there a feather of down; one is very heavy, the other flits in the air, but both are material. Here is a plank of wood, there is a pane of glass; one is entirely opaque, the other transparent, but both are material. Here is a piece of pure gold a foot square, and worth many thousands of dollars, there is a bushel of mud worth nothing; both are material.

It is our opinion, founded both in revelation and science, that celestial beings are as material as men, only that they are more highly organized, more refined,—matter on a higher plane. Who that has carefully observed the wonderful and infinite diversity of matter, even as seen in this earth, will deny the reasonableness of this position? When we have found out God to perfection, when we have explored earth, heaven, and hell, and have fathomed all the infinite diversities and capabilities of matter, then, and not till then, will it do for us to say what God must be and what matter cannot be. Therefore this objection against the materiality of God is not a valid one.

God made this solid earth, this material planet, with all the material things upon it. He made a material man, a material atmosphere, material food for man, a material sun to light and warm this earth. He made all the millions of stars on high, every one of them as material as our own earth. If matter is so repulsive, so opposed to the nature of God, why has he made so vast a creation out of it?

Consider the further fact that the Saviour of men is a material being. He was born of a material woman, walked upon this material earth, breathed its air, ate of its food, died upon a material cross, spilled his material blood, was buried in the earth, his material body was resurrected, and is exalted at the right hand of God, and now sits upon the throne of the universe. "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." Rev. 3:21. These facts are directly asserted by the most orthodox creeds. The fourth article in the creed of the Episcopalian church says, "Christ did truly rise again from death and took again his body, with flesh, bones, and all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature, wherewith he ascended into Heaven, and there sitteth." So also says the Methodist Discipline. Then we have indeed a material Saviour, sitting upon the throne of the Father. Why, then, should those who adopt these creeds be horrified at the idea of a material God? We advise them to examine this point again.

*(To be continued.)*

[NOTE: In the issues of the *Review* following this last article, there is no obvious continuation of the series. How, then, do we make sense of the phrase "to be continued"? One option is that it was a simple mistake by the typesetter. Another is that the series was originally designed to be longer, but plans changed. It is also possible that the continuation referred to was fulfilled in a new series of articles under a different name. If this latter option is correct, the continuation may be found in a series of articles written by Canright on the immortality of the soul, published in the *Review* starting on [Nov. 14, 1878](#). The challenge with this is that the content does not appear to be a direct continuation of *The Personality of God*; in fact, the personality of God is never



directly discussed in that series. What seems like a more direct continuation in terms of content is a series by Canright published in *The Signs of the Times* from June 19 – July 31, 1879, entitled [Can God Organize Matter To Think?](#) This was later edited and published as a booklet called [Matter and Spirit; or, The Problem of Human Thought](#). This series (and booklet) naturally continues the subject of Canright's Personality of God articles. It deals with matter and materialism in much the same way as the present series, especially the last article. It even builds upon the same examples (such as the piece of ice) and it directly deals with the subject of the personality of God. While we cannot say for sure that it is the continuation referred to at the end of this last article, it is, in truth, a continuation of the subject, so we recommend it for those who want to learn more.]

To learn more about early SDA materialism, see our compilation [Materialism: Our Forgotten Foundation](#), and you can read everything on our website related to the [Personality of God HERE](#).