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Living with Confidence Despite Some Open Questions: Upholding the Biblical Truth of Creation Amidst Theological Pluralism

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Introduction

The question of biblical creation is a very sensitive issue that has far reaching consequences. The clash between faith and science cannot easily be tucked away as having little impact on the rest of what we believe. One of the main issues in this debate is proper hermeneutics, rather than antagonism between Scripture and science.

But what do we do with conflicting positions on the issue of origins that arise from the findings of science and the study of Scripture? What should we do with unsolved problems? How much room is there for pluralism in the issue of origins and creation? Should concerns for unity shape our theology?

These are all legitimate questions that deserve to be addressed. At the same time, we all know they do not lend themselves to easy solutions and will not be solved by superficial answers. In this article I will attempt to respond to those challenging questions by submitting for consideration some foundational ideas that deserve to be addressed.

First we will briefly look at the role creation plays in Scripture and its significance to biblical faith. We will then consider the relationship between faith and natural science before pointing out some aspects that can help us, I trust, to live confidently despite some open questions and to uphold the biblical truth of creation amidst theological pluralism. We will conclude with some challenges that we have to face as theologians, scientists, and leaders of this church as we deal with this crucial question. Let's begin, however, by briefly looking at the question of whether creation is an essential part of biblical teaching.

The Prominent Role of Creation in Scripture

Is creation an essential topic in Scripture, or is creation an unimportant side issue that can easily be neglected?[1] Does creation belong to "*doubtful disputations*" (Rom 14:1 KJV), or is it a "*dispute over opinions*" (Rom 14:1 NAB)? Is the topic of creation "*a foolish controversy*" (Titus 3:9 NAS) that is useless and should be shunned because it is not essential to salvation, or does the doctrine of creation belong to those "*elementary truths of God's Word*" (Heb 5:12 NIV) that are absolutely indispensable to biblical faith? I humbly submit that creation belongs to the latter category.

Creation is foundational for biblical thinking in many ways. In the symphonic melody of biblical ideas creation constitutes a recurring theme picked up by many biblical writers in the Old and in the New Testament. From Genesis (Gen 1:1ff) to the book of Revelation (Revelation 21:1ff), from the very beginning to the very end of Scripture, creation is a dominant and indispensable theme of God's Word. The subject of God's special creation permeates Scripture at many places. Beyond Genesis 1–2 we find specific references[2] in the wisdom literature of Job (cf. Job 38–41), in the Psalms (cf. Ps 8; 19; 104 and others), in the prophets (cf. Amos 4:13; 5:8–9; 9:5–6; Isa 40:26–28, 65; 66; Jer 10:11–13; 27:5; 32:17; 51:15–16 and others) and throughout the New Testament (cf. Acts 4:24; 14:15; 17:24; 2 Cor 4:6; Eph 3:9; Col 1:16; Heb 4:4; Rev 10:6, etc.). Several highly theological arguments that pertain to foundational matters of salvation depend on a literal creation (cf. Paul's elaborate theological argument in Rom 5:12–21 and 1 Cor 15:45–49, where Adam is presupposed as historical individual and the fall of Adam as the reason for the entrance of sin, from which Christ has come to save us). Jesus Christ himself is presented in Scripture as creator (Col 1:16–19; John 1:1–3; Heb 1:2), and he affirms a literal creation as

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[1] One wonders whether there is really such a thing as an "unimportant side issue" in Scripture that can easily be neglected. If we have the means to understand a biblical subject and the opportunity to obey it but deliberately neglect to follow this plain duty, we deceive ourselves and shall find in the end that this can be an error of no small consequence. It is reported that the great Protestant reformer Martin Luther once aptly said: "If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every position of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved; and to be steady on all the battle fields besides, is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point" (quoted in Francis A. Schaeffer, *Der Schöpfungsbericht: Was die Bibel über Kosmos und Geschichte wirklich aussagt* (Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus Verlag, 1976; original title: *No Final Conflict* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1975], 12).

[2] It would be a worthwhile task to study the numerous allusions to God's creation throughout Scripture, something that space and time does not allow us to pursue at this point. A convenient and concise overview of biblical references to creation is provided by William H. Shea, "Creation," in Raoul Dederen, ed., *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 419–440. The biblical passages we list as examples do not exhaustively cover every reference to creation in Scripture. They simply illustrate the fact that creation is indeed a prominent theme throughout Scripture.

the beginning of this world (cf. Matt 19:4–5, referring to Gen 1:27 and 2:24). One can interpret this widespread occurrence of the theme of creation as evidence for the theological unity of Scripture. Interestingly, there are also special links between the end-time message of the Bible and creation that play an important part in the last book of the Bible (cf. Rev 1:10; 4:8, 11; 10:6; 14:7). Finally, the book of Revelation points to the grand new creation, the ultimate recreation of the new earth (Rev 21–22). I wonder: if creation is upheld by the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures **in heaven**, who are positioned around the throne of God (cf. Rev 4:11), why shouldn't we as individual believers and as the Seventh-day Adventist Church corporately uphold the doctrine of creation **on earth** until Jesus returns?

Even this cursory presentation of creation in the biblical account makes it abundantly clear that creation is no side issue. We are dealing here with one of the most prominent themes in all the Bible. The significance and the wide ranging implications of the concept of biblical creation become even more obvious when we briefly look at the interrelation of creation with other significant biblical subjects. To this we will turn now.

Creation and Biblical Faith

Creation is more than a recurring theme in Scripture. The reality of creation is profusely interconnected with many other biblical topics. Therefore we will now turn to the question of the significance of creation to biblical faith.

The Significance of Creation to Biblical Thought. The great significance of creation to biblical thought becomes evident through its multifaceted interrelation with other biblical doctrines and biblical faith.[3] While we do not have the time to describe this in detail, I would like point out at least the following twelve theologically relevant connections:

Creation and the Nature of Man
Creation and Sin
Creation and the Origin and Nature of Death
Creation and Theodicy
Creation and Salvation
Creation and the Person and Work of Christ
Creation and Love
Creation and the Nature of God
Creation and the Meaning of History
Creation and Biblical Ethics
Creation and the Sabbath
Creation and Eschatology

[3] It has been pointed out in a noteworthy recent dissertation on this topic that too little attention is being given to the dogmatic consequences of creation and alternative models of (evolutionary) origins of this world and of life on earth (cf. Reinhard Junker, *Leben durch Sterben? Schöpfung, Heilsgeschichte und Evolution*. Studium Integrale (Neuhausen/Stuttgart: Hänssler Verlag, 1994), 90–91.

Preliminary Conclusion. Even this cursory listing of biblical connections that exist with creation makes it abundantly clear that biblical creation is no side issue. It is a core element of biblical faith and indispensable to our understanding of the nature of God and His dealings with this world. The concept of creation has far reaching implications for biblical eschatology, for the meaning of history, for a proper understanding of human nature, for a correct understanding of sin and death as well as salvation from sin and all evil that has intruded into our world. Hence creation is intimately connected to the central theme of salvation from sin through Jesus Christ. Biblical creation is at the foundation of a biblical ethics that takes seriously all of God's commandments, including the fourth commandment, and motivates our responsibility and stewardship for God's creation. A proper understanding of the biblical day of rest is closely connected to biblical creation. In fact there is no other convincing explanation for the origin of a seven-day week, except as a result of God's creation.

The big picture is abundantly clear! Biblical creation is certainly no marginal doctrine in Scripture. Creation is an essential and indispensable component of biblical faith. It is obvious that biblical creation and evolutionary thought are diametrically opposed to each other. In fact they are incompatible. To attempt to unite evolution and theistic belief, as for instance in theistic evolution, ignores the fundamentally different outlook and presuppositions of both, which becomes apparent when we look at the implications for biblical doctrine and the nature of God. They start with fundamentally different presuppositions.

While the general picture is clear, we are still faced with a number of questions that await a solution and/or a satisfactory answer. How do we deal with challenges from the natural sciences to a biblical creation, and what is the relationship between faith and science?

What is the Relationship Between Faith and Science?

In order to tackle some of those questions, we need to gain an understanding of what the relationship between faith and science should be. Let's briefly look at various proposals on how faith and science ought to be connected.

Conflict Between Faith and Science. One widely popular modern proposal sees faith and science continually at war with each other. This has resulted in a most serious conflict between faith and science.[4] According to this perspective, any attempt to harmonize faith and science harms both religion and science. Many today are convinced that modern science has eliminated the justification for belief, by faith, in a meaningful and purposeful creation of the cosmos. Faith

[4] A description of this warfare can be found in Andrew D. White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* (New York: George Braziller, 1955); from an Adventist perspective, cf. Moleurus Couperus, "Tensions Between Religion and Science," *Spectrum* 10/4 (1980): 74–88.

in a meaningful origin is believed to be able to survive only as a mere feeling.[5] Richard Dawkins, member of the Royal Society and professor at Oxford, even states that faith is one of the great evils in the world, comparable to a dangerous virus, but much harder to kill.[6] How can such a conflict be resolved? There have been several unsatisfactory proposals.

Change and Adapt our Interpretation of Scripture. One approach to solving such a dispute is to change the interpretation of clear statements of Scripture in order to adjust Scripture to our current level of scientific knowledge. Especially those parts of Scripture that speak about the creation of this world through God's supernatural power are often classified as historically and culturally conditioned and thus no longer relevant and normative to our modern understanding of the origin of the world. The biblical writers are believed to have been limited in their understanding of science and are relegated to a level with their contemporaries who were only children of their time and culture. According to some, "the gift of inspiration did not make them, in effect, astronomers or geophysicists or biologists."[7] It has been pointed out that within the Seventh-day Adventist Church "progressives placed the conclusions of natural science above the cosmological statements of the Bible."[8] Thus, the real issue in the conflict between conservative and liberal positions in the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been a problem of biblical hermeneutics. "If the two sides had ever reached theological agreement, the so called scientific differences would have vanished."[9] It is interesting that the concepts of theistic evolution normally are not

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[5] Cf. P. W. Atkins, "Will Science Ever Fail?" *New Scientist* (8 August 1992): 32–35, as quoted in John Lennox, *Hat die Wissenschaft Gott begraben? Eine kritische Analyse moderner Denkvorausetzungen* (Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus, 2002), 5.

[6] Richard Dawkins, "Is Science a Religion?" *The Humanist*, (January/February 1997): 26–39, as quoted in Lennox, 5. At this point history can help us to remember that the conviction that the universe is structured has theistic roots. Modern science has at its basis a monotheistic perspective. Cf. Melvin Calvin, *Chemical Evolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 258, as quoted in Lennox, 9. In fact, the popular opinion that the relationship between religion and science has been characterized by warfare and hostility is historically wrong and a gross distortion of the facts (cf. Colin Russel, "The Confict Metaphor and its Social Origins" *Science and Christian Belief* 1 [1989]: 3–26, as quoted in Lennox, 14).

[7] Raymond F. Cottrell, "Inspiration and Authority of the Bible in Relation to Phenomena of the Natural World," in James L. Hayward, ed., *Creation Reconsidered: Scientific, Biblical, and Theological Perspectives* (Roseville, CA: Association of Adventist Forums, 2000), 199; cf. also Frederick E. J. Harder, "Prophets: Infallible or Authoritative?" in idem., 226, who raises the question: "Can a prophet be authoritative without being inerrant?" For Harder a prophet seems to be "human and fallible" (230) and "no human being—not even a prophet—is exempt from liability to human error or character defects" (226). Thus, according to Harder, "if we should find scientific or historical error, this would in no way detract from the purpose for which scripture was inspired" (230).

[8] Martin Frederick Hanna, "Contemporary Tensions Within Adventism Concerning the Relations of Science to the Doctrine of Creation," unpublished research paper, Andrews University, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, 1992, available in the Adventist Heritage Center.

[9] Edward Lugenbeal, "The Conservative Restoration At Geoscience," *Spectrum* 15/2 (1984): 24–25.

derived from biblical passages but from considerations of the view of God and God's involvement in the natural processes of this world. Furthermore, the idea of theistic evolution is also dependent on historical-critical arguments.[10]

Such an approach in effect leaves an ugly broad ditch between God's Word and the rest of God's created reality that cannot be harmonized. This approach is unsatisfactory for many reasons, but especially because it does not do justice to the historical nature of God's revelation and the many intersections between faith and history. History is the realm in which God acts. Scripture repeatedly testifies to this fact. The truth of the biblical teaching about God is connected to a chain of historical events. Thus it is a characteristic of biblical revelation that theological statements are connected with historical events that at least partially can be verified. While it is true that the Bible is no textbook on biology or geology, there is an important connection between God's Word and the history of this world that cannot and should not be ignored.

Many have been aware of the danger in changing the interpretation of Scripture to match science, noting that it leads to an unavoidable reinterpretation of the biblical message and the content of faith. In order to safeguard faith from the critical attacks of naturalistic science, some have resorted to another solution that is no less problematic than the first.

Separation of Faith From Science. Another approach to the issue of faith and science that typically has been favored in neo-orthodox or neo-liberal circles, where historical-critical methods are at work, has been the separation of faith from science. The role of science is believed to be describing the mechanism and process of the origin of this world, whereas the role of theology is to attribute the purpose and existence of the universe to God.[11] Science, in other words, is taken to provide the explanation of the "how" of the origin of this world, whereas Scripture is allowed to provide a theological rational "why" this world came into being. Science is mute on the question "why"; Scripture is inept on the question "how." Science and Scripture are believed to serve useful but different purposes. Such an approach, however, is unsatisfactory for several reasons.

First of all, such an approach seems to uncritically take for granted the neutrality of science and assumes the equal weight of faith and reason. But are faith and reason really complementary faculties that are intended by God to be used in balance as we endeavor to understand the biblical record? How can faith and reason correct each other, as is suggested by some?[12] Does such a view do justice to sin's effect on human reason?

Furthermore, the separation of faith and science means that faith is no longer relevant to all areas of life. Faith is relegated to an existential level that

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[10] Junker, *Leben durch sterben?*, 82.

[11] Cf. Milo V. Anderson, "The Relation Between Science and Inspiration," in *Creation Reconsidered*, 238.

[12] Cf. Cottrell, "Inspiration and Authority of the Bible," 218.

has nothing to do with history. When both faith and science are assigned their autonomous realm, each is pursued independently from each other in its own right. This, however, is theological segregation, which amounts to nothing less than theological or scientific apartheid. Such a compartmentalizing does not succeed in integrating faith and science into a harmonious one. The challenge before us is to not simply repeat the shortcomings of those other approaches, but to look for alternatives that are biblically faithful, that acknowledge the Word of God as the integrating factor for faith and science, and that look to Scripture as the ultimate and authoritative norm for faith and doctrine. This leads us to an authentic Adventist alternative: the integration of faith and science.

An Adventist Alternative: the Integration of Faith and Science. Adventists have long been known for their interest in integrating faith and learning.[13] Integration is not separation or segregation! Integration is possible only on the basis of some higher authority that can be appealed to and that provides the basis and parameter for a harmonious integration. For Seventh-day Adventist this integrating authority is the Bible, the written Word of God.

Priority of Faith Over Reason and Science. The role reason plays in theology is crucial. This role has been understood in several different ways throughout history.[14] While some have proposed that faith and reason are on an equal par with each other, Scripture is clear that there is no neutral, independent human reason that is capable of arriving at truth on its own. Rather, the natural man indulges in the desires of the flesh *and of the mind* (Ephesians 2:3). The sinfulness of man has affected all aspects of his existence, including human reason. Hence, sinful human reason stands in need of conversion just as the rest of man needs to be renewed. Human beings become truly "reasonable" in the biblical sense when "*we take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ*" (2 Cor. 10:5 NASB).

In contrast to autonomous human reason, the biblical concept of reason could be termed "faithful, or obedient reason." It is informed by God's Word and acts obediently according to God's written revelation. Faithful reason is centered neither on nature, nor on science, nor on the voice of tradition, but on God and His trustworthy Word. The problem is not simply that unconverted reason produces *results* that disturb faith. Rather, unconverted human reason carries with it *presuppositions* that from the very outset destroy all possibilities

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[13] Gary Land has pointed out that "it appears that for at least the first 50 years they operated an educational system, Adventists had relatively little interest in the sciences for their own sake" ("God's Second Book: Adventist Education and the Sciences," *The Journal of Adventist Education* 64/5 [2002]: 4. According to Land, however, the challenge that is upon us now is whether "science on Adventist campuses is becoming important in its own right, rather than principally serving other purposes." Thus, "Adventist scientists face the challenge of redefining what it means to be an Adventist in science and the role science is to take in Adventist education" (ibid., 8).

[14] Time and space does not permit us to deal with this important issue at greater length at this point. However, the reader is referred to a deeper study from an Adventist perspective in Frank M. Hasel, "Theology and the Role of Reason," *JATS*, 4/2 (1993): 172–198, esp. 172–184.

of an harmonious integration of reason into faith. By nature, unconverted human reason does not joyfully submit to what is revealed to man by God.[15]

Furthermore, the issue is not that we have to choose between blindly trusting God on the one hand and thinking carefully about our beliefs on the other, as some seem to suggest. Faithful reason is no sacrifice of the intellect, *but the integration of reason into faith*. And here the wording and the word-sequence is of crucial importance, because the integration of reason into faith implies that faith has priority! It is not an integration of faith into reason. In that case, reason would have the final say. Nor is it an attempt to balance faith and reason.[16]

As a church we should be aware that in trying to balance two things, no unity is gained. If equality is the ultimate goal in the issue of the relationship between faith and reason, no true unity is possible. Whenever we focus on having equal shares, this very focus tends to bring the two into an antagonistic relationship. Equals are not necessarily together; they stand on opposite sides of the equation, constantly watching that the other side does not get ahead. They are not united but in contest with each other.

In trying to balance faith and reason—as some have proposed—who finally decides how to balance one with the other? Who finally "keeps the balance?" History has shown that every time reason tried to support faith, it was reason that finally decided on the content of faith and changed and adapted God's revelation to the current ideology of the day. In the words of church historian Walter Köhler, "reason in theology has always had the tendency to change or shift its position from servant (Diener) to Lord (Herr)"[17] from co-worker to master, from helper to ruler.

Human reason is a divine gift, and as such it has its worth and cannot be ignored. The competence of human reason, however, is limited by the negative effects of sin. Natural reason is able to engage itself in science and the investigation of natural phenomena. However, it is thoroughly incompetent when it tries to discern divine realities. Human reason transgresses its limits when it attempts on its own to determine the spiritual meaning of Scripture. Here we need the enlightening help of the Holy Spirit, who helps the believer to know what God has really done (cf. Eph 1:17–18). To correctly understand God's work in this world—including His supernatural creation of nature—is possible

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[15] Cf. Frank M. Hasel, "Theology and the Role of Reason," 184–186.

[16] So for instance Raymond F. Cottrell, "Inspiration and Authority of the Bible in Relation to Phenomena of the Natural World," 212, 213; also idem., *Reason and Faith* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1966), 18, 21, 37. Similarly Richard Rice, *The Reign of God: An Introduction to Christian Theology from a Seventh-day Adventist Perspective* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews UP, 1985), 5; cf. also Fritz Guy, *Thinking Theologically: Adventist Christianity and the Interpretation of Faith* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews UP, 1999), 95–96, 105–107.

[17] Walther Köhler, *Dogmengeschichte als Geschichte des christlichen Selbstbewusstseins: Das Zeitalter der Reformation* (Zurich: Max Niehans Verlag, 1951), 135.

only if God reveals to man what he has done. To integrate faith and reason is possible only on the basis of Scripture.

This leads us to our next point, the priority of Scripture over nature.

Priority of Scripture over Nature. Nature has been called God's second book.[18] Because nature is sustained by God's power and testifies to the wisdom and love of God,[19] some have suggested that "the Bible and the natural world, each in its own way, is an inspired revelation that has something important to say about God."[20] However, to elevate nature—and with nature the natural sciences—to the same level as Scripture, to accept both—nature and Scripture—as valuable revelations from God,[21] overlooks an important difference and distinction. While nature has a divine origin, neither Scripture nor Ellen White attribute the quality of **inspiration** to nature. The Bible is God's inspired book. Nature is not. Nature is God's creation and came into existence through God's special design. As such it reveals something about God, its creator. But nature is not inspired.

Ellen White frequently uses the phrase "the book of nature" to speak of God's creation as revealing something about God's love and power, yet she clearly differentiates and distinguishes "the book of nature" from the "pages of inspiration."[22] Even in Eden before the entrance of sin, man needed the revealing Word of God to interpret nature correctly. How much more is God's revelation needed today, after the entrance of sin has marred and spoiled the perfect and harmonious nature of God's creation. In the words of Ellen White:

> To man's unaided reason, nature's teaching can not but be contradictory and disappointing. Only in the light of revelation can it be read aright. 'Through faith we understand'' (Hebrews 11:3) . . . Only by the aid of that Spirit who in the beginning 'was brooding upon the face of the waters;' of that Word by whom 'all things were made;' of that 'true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world,' can the testimony of science be rightly interpreted. Only by their guidance can its deepest truths be discerned. Only under the direction of the Omniscient One shall we, in the study of His works, be enabled to think His thoughts after Him.[23]

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[18] The phrase "nature is God's second book" is not found in Ellen G. White's writings. D. A. Delafield, among others, has used this phrase. According to Delafield, "Mrs. White loved the beauty of the natural world. To her, nature was God's second book" (D. A. Delafield, *Ellen G. White in Europe, 1885–1887* (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald, 1975), 127. Ellen G. White, however, frequently used the phrase "the book of nature."

[19] Cf. Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1942), 102–103.

[20] Raymond F. Cottrell, "Inspiration and Authority of the Bible in Relation to Phenomena of the Natural World," in *Creation Reconsidered*, 195.

[21] Cf. Karen Bottomley, "Pilgrimage in the Rockies: the AAF Geology Tour," *Spectrum* 16/4 (1985): 21–26.

[22] So for instance in Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1911), 571.

[23] Ellen G. White, *Education*, 34.

According to Ellen White, "the book of nature is a great lesson book," but it should be used "**in connection with the Scriptures**,"[24] for "the Bible is second to no other book; it is without a rival."[25] God's written Word is certain and reliable (Titus 3:8; 1 Tim 1:15). The Bible is trustworthy, deserving full acceptance (1 Tim 4:9; cf. 2 Tim 2:11; Heb 2:3). In Col 2:8 the apostle Paul writes: "See that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world" (NASB).

This means that Scripture and nature are **not** on equal par with each other, as far as the quality and the character of their revelation of God and his work is concerned. God's special revelation (Scripture) has precedence over natural revelation (creation/nature). Nature reveals something about God at best only indirectly. For nature as it exists today, as well as our human reasoning ability, is distorted by sin. Thus, on our own, we cannot interpret nature correctly. Speaking about Adam and Eve, who had yielded to Satan and fallen into sin, Ellen White writes:

> In losing the garments of holiness, they lost the light that had illuminated nature. **No longer could they read it aright**. They could not discern the character of God in His works. **So today man cannot of himself read aright the teaching of nature**. Unless guided by divine wisdom, he exalts nature and the laws of nature above nature's God. **This is why mere human ideas in regard to science so often contradict the teaching of God's word**.[26]

Scripture is superior to nature, for it is God's inspired witness. Creation came into existence through God's creative Word. However, it is God's written Word that reveals to us an authentic account of the origin of this world. Hence, Scripture should be the normative source for our understanding of the origin of this world. Ellen White was clear that

> apart from Bible history, geology can prove nothing. Those who reason so confidently upon its discoveries have no adequate conception of the size of men, animals, and trees before the Flood, or of the great changes which then took place. Relicts found in the earth do give evidence of conditions differing in many respects from the present, but the time when these conditions existed can be learned only from the Inspired Record. In the history of the Flood, inspiration has explained that which geology alone could never fathom.[27]

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[24] Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald, 1900), 24, emphasis added.

[25] Ellen G. White, *Our High Calling* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1961), 352.

[26] Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1905), 461–462, emphasis added.

[27] Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1958), 112.

She continues:

> when professedly scientific men treat upon these subjects from a merely human point of view, they will assuredly come to wrong conclusions. . . . The greatest minds, if not guided by the word of God in their research, become bewildered in their attempts to trace the relations of science and revelation.[28]

According to Ellen White's divinely given insight,

> there should be settled belief in the divine authority of God's Holy Word. The Bible is not to be tested by men's ideas of science. Human knowledge is an unreliable guide. Skeptics who read the Bible for the sake of caviling, may, through an imperfect comprehension of either science or revelation, claim to find contradictions between them; but rightly understood, they are in perfect harmony. Moses wrote under the guidance of the Spirit of God, and a correct theory of geology will never claim discoveries that cannot be reconciled with his statements. All truth, whether in nature or in revelation, is consistent with itself in all its manifestations.[29]

This idea is echoed also in the *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, which states that "there is no reason for conflicts between science and religion. Truth, whether scientific or spiritual, whether measurable or beyond the scope of direct human observation and testing, is consistent with itself in all its manifestations."[30] In other words, Adventists believe that "the natural world, rightly understood, is in complete harmony with the revelation of the divine character, mind, and will set forth in Scripture."[31]

The Integration of Faith and Science. Because both Scripture and God's created world have the same author, there will be the possibility of an intrinsic harmony between Scripture and the natural world. Such harmony is to be expected, at least in principle. In the light of **Scripture** nature—and the origin of nature and life—will be understood correctly. Rightly understood, there will be perfect harmony instead of warfare. The revealed Word of God and the natural world will be in agreement, "for all truth, whether in nature or in revelation, is consistent with itself in all its manifestations."[32] The faithful believer

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[28] Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 113.

[29] Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 114.

[30] "Science and Religion," in Bobbie Jane van Dolson and Leo R. van Dolson, eds., *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, second rev. ed. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1996), 2:559.

[31] "Science and Religion," idem., 559. Thus, "the unfortunate conflict that has arisen in recent times between the study of science and religion is not the result of inherent irreconcilability between revealed truth and scientific truth" (ibid., 560). Instead, "Seventh-day Adventists have taught that there is a positive relationship between science and religion" (idem., 561).

[32] Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 114.

> does not test the Bible by men's ideas of science; he brings these ideas to the test of the unerring standard. He knows that in true science there can be nothing contrary to the teaching of the word; since both have the same Author, a correct understanding of both will prove them to be in harmony. Whatever in so-called scientific teaching contradicts the testimony of God's word is mere human guesswork.[33]

According to this insight from Ellen White, true integration of faith and science is possible on the basis of the higher authority of Scripture. Anything that contradicts the unerring standard of Scripture is to her only "so-called" science and in fact mere human guess work.

The *divine origin* of nature can be correctly understood only on the basis of Scripture. Scripture provides the spectacles[34] that help to gain a reliable insight into the supernatural *origin* of the natural world and the beginning of life on this earth. Scripture should be the basis to interpret the *origin* of nature—but *naturalistic presuppositions* of science should not be allowed to reinterpret the clear statements of Scripture that speak of God's recent creation in "six literal consecutive, contiguous, creative, natural 24-hour days."[35] Since all truth comes from God, ideally there will be no conflict between good science and good theology. When properly understood, science and faith are not contradictory in nature, but present a more complete picture of reality than can be achieved by viewing either science or theology exclusively. Both creation and Scripture are to be studied to apprehend the wonders of God's wisdom in creation, but in our search for truth the Bible must remain the final arbiter. Here special revelation (Scripture) must always take precedence over general revelation (nature).

On the basis of the priority and superiority of Scripture, some remarkable possibilities open up to the believing scientist and theologian. Rather than adapting biblical ideas to the latest outlook in science, Scripture can have a unique input on science by asking questions that could function as a source of inspiration in developing new strategies of scientific research. Wolfhart Pannenberg's remarkable words deserve to be taken seriously: "The theologian must not be too quick to adapt theological ideas and language to the latest outlook in the sciences, especially where such adaptation requires substantial readjustment of traditional doctrine. The theological vision of the world can also function as a challenge to science and as a source of inspiration in developing new strategies of research."[36] While such a perspective opens up new windows of opportunities

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[33] Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, 462.

[34] Calvin used the well-known simile "Spectacles" to describe the role of Scripture as related to the revelation of the Creator in creation (cf. *Institutes*, 1.6.1; 1.10.1). According to Calvin, Scripture can communicate to us what the revelation in the creation cannot (ibid., 1.6.4).

[35] Cf. Richard M. Davidson, "The Biblical Account of Origins," presentation at the International Faith and Science Conference in Ogden, Utah, August 25, 2002, in this issue of *JATS*.

[36] Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Theology and Philosophy in interaction with Science: A Response to the Message of Pope John Paul II on the Occasion of the Newton Tricentennial in 1987," in Robert J.

for fresh investigation of origins on the basis of Scripture, still some crucial questions remain.

The Challenge of Certainty

To what extent can we as Christians speak with certainty about biblical origins in light of the fact that all of our knowledge is tentative and/or incomplete? How do we as Christians relate contradictory statements of science to Scripture? Is it possible to be certain about the biblical doctrine of creation, especially in light of a conflict of views and the sometimes seemingly overwhelming evidence that speaks against the possibility of biblical creation?

The Problem of Certainty. Certainty (from Latin *certus*, sure) is the opposite of skepticism and doubt[37] and is commonly associated with the feeling of assurance (certitude) that something is true and undeniable.[38] It has been pointed out that the term certainty includes those aspects that are described in the Greek language with **πίστις**, (*pistis*—faith [cf. Rom. 3:3], trust, belief; the Christian faith; conviction, assurance, proof) on the one hand and **ἀσφάλεια** (*aspaleia*—security, safety, accurate information, full truth [Lk 1.4]) and **βέβαιος**, (*bebaios*—reliable; firm, well-founded; confirmed, verified; effective [cf. 2 Pet. 1:19—the prophetic message that is altogether reliable, NAS]) on the other.[39]

Such a certainty is not gained through the practice of methodological and systematic doubt. "In general, the feelings associated with doubt are anxiety or hesitation, which are identified as feelings of doubt when they arise in contexts

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Russell, William R. Stoeger, S.J., and George V. Coyne, eds. *John Paul II on Science and Religion: Reflections on the New View From Rome* (Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame P, 1990), 78. Unfortunately, Pannenberg himself does not follow his own advice and seems to advocate the readjustment of theological vision and the reassessment of doctrinal affirmations of the past in the light of modern scientific developments as presented by the theory of evolution of life (ibid., 78–79).

[37] It has been pointed out that "doubt is the negation of belief, the condition of not having reached a positive conclusion for or against any proposition. . . . in the doubting attitude there is at least the absence of a categorical or of a settled judgment with reference to the idea in question" ("Doubt," by Norman Wilde, *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912], 4/862). Doubt as a permanent state of mind would be little better than intellectual death, for the human mind lives as it believes. "The danger of doubting is not only that it may become a fixed habit, but that interest may centre in the process itself . . . and become a mania (doubting-madness; *folie du doute; Grübelsucht*)" ("Doubt," by Edwin D. Starbuck, in *idem*., 864).

[38] Cf. "certainty, psychological or intuitive," in Peter A. Angeles, *Dictionary of Philosophy* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1981), 36. On the spectrum of meaning associated with the term "certainty" cf. the following articles: "certainty," by Peter Klein, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Craig (London: Routledge, 1998), 2:264–267; "Certainty," by C. D. Rollins, *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 2:67–71; and "Gewissheit," by Alfred Schöpf, *Handbuch Philosophischer Grundbegriffe*, eds. Hermann Krings, Hans Michael Baumgartner and Christoph Wild (Munich: Kösel, 1973), 2:585–596.

[39] "Gewissheit," by W. Halbfass, in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. Joachim Ritter (Basel: Schwabe, 1974), 3:592–593.

involving questions of belief."[40] Skeptical doubt does not lead to certainty. Neither is certainty reached through scientific investigation. It is a well-known fact that "Science does not lead to certainty. Its conclusions are always incomplete, tentative, and subject to revision."[41] To affirm the truth of God's supernatural creation as it is testified in Holy Scripture is "no haven of ignorance" for wishful thinking or pious experience. Yet we should be aware of the danger of deifying (natural) science and elevating it above the written Word of God thereby expecting more from science than it is able to offer.

Certainty is not something that we can achieve. It is a gift of God, just as faith is a divine gift. Speaking about the book of nature that is to be studied in connection with the Scriptures, Ellen White has grasped this important insight when she writes:

> As the works of God are studied, **the Holy Spirit flashes conviction into the mind**. **It is not the conviction that logical reasoning produces**; but unless the mind has become too dark to know God, the eye too dim to see Him, the ear too dull to hear His voice, **a deeper meaning is grasped, and the sublime, spiritual truths of the written word** are impressed on the heart.[42]

Conviction comes **through the Holy Spirit**, when the **truths of the written Word of God** are impressed upon the heart. The divine gift of believing is that faculty that "*makes us certain of realities we do not see*" (Heb. 11:1) for faith is to the unseen world what the senses are to the visible world.

Perhaps the act of divine pardon may illustrate our Christian experience at this point.[43] When Christ announces: "You are forgiven!" how does one know one is forgiven? Is there any certainty that God has indeed forgiven me and taken away all my sins and my guilt? Can I be certain that Christ has forgiven me, even if my (subjective) experience and the external evidence (my sinful deeds) seem to contradict my being forgiven through faith in Jesus Christ? And yet, Scripture tells us that we can be certain that Christ has forgiven us. We can have the assurance of salvation. "*These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life."* (1 John 5:13 NAS). We are even called to proclaim this good news with confidence and with conviction (2 Cor 5:20). We can indeed know that God has forgiven us and that we have eternal life because Jesus Christ has acted in history. We know about this past act of God because Scripture bears witness to

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[40] Harry G. Frankfurt, "Doubt," in Paul Edwards, ed. *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 2:413 (412–414).

[41] Ian Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science*. The Gifford Lectures 1989–1991 (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 1:35.

[42] Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1900), 24; emphasis added.

[43] Cf. Thomas C. Oden, *The Living God. Systematic Theology: Volume One* (Peabody, MA: Prince, 2001), 1:382.

what Jesus has done for us and because God's written Word provides the meaning and explanation of that historical act that would be missing if God had not revealed it to us.

In a similar manner, I submit, certainty is possible in the area of biblical creation as well. Here God has also acted in history and has provided an explanation through His revelation as recorded in Scripture that helps us to sufficiently understand and believe what has taken place to proclaim it with conviction and certainty—despite some open questions.

Living With Confidence Despite Some Open Questions—The Paradigm of Love

Love might teach us some important lessons on how we can live with confidence despite some unresolved questions. Let me explain. The apostle Paul has stated: "*But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love*" (1 Cor 13:13 NAS). Love is the foundation for faith. Love brings forth faith. Love creates hope. This is why love is the greatest of the three qualities that remain: "faith, hope, love." It is the empathy of love, rather than critical distance and doubting skepticism, that helps us to understand and know. Only love enables us to believe things "*which have not entered the heart of men, all that God has prepared for those who love Him*" (1 Cor. 2:9 NAS).

The epistemological foundation of understanding and knowing is love. Because we have received love (from our parents, from God), we are able to learn and to understand things. Only when we love God will we be able to keep His commandments (John 14:15). Only when we love His written Word will we be able to understand and obey it correctly. Only love is able to bring forth certainty and assurance.

God's love is never abstract and on the theoretical level only. God's love is always specific and tangible. Unlike the Platonic love of Greek philosophy, God's love is revealed in definite historical acts, be that His creation or His incarnation. Creation was an act of love. The Incarnation was an act of love as well. And so is the re-creation of sinners.

I submit that love can be a help to us in dealing with the issue of creation and evolution as well as in discerning the qualitative difference between those two incompatible systems. God has provided sufficient evidence that He is love. God's love does not solve every question we might have concerning His love, yet He has proven beyond the shadow of a doubt that He is love, for He has so loved this world that He has given His only son so that we might be saved. Scripture speaks about His love. God demonstrated and proved His love when he became human and died on the Cross so that we can have the assurance of forgiveness and of eternal life.

It is worthwhile to briefly compare God's love with the mechanism of evolution at this point:

1. God's love has a purpose and aims at a specific goal. Evolutionary chance, by contrast, is blind and random.

2. God's love saves by overcoming death. Evolution destroys, for it needs death to evolve.

3. Divine love trusts and hopes, despite some open questions. Only love knows and attains certainty. Evolution, by contrast, is always provisional, never arrives, does not know how things initially came about, where they will end, and what the outcome will be. With evolution there is no certainty.

To mix God's purposeful love, as demonstrated in creation and re-creation, with the aimless, blind, and destructive chance of Evolution is to deliberately send mixed signals that distort the character of God and his dealings with the world.

Just as with love, God has given ample evidence that clearly testifies that he has created this world supernaturally. While God has not solved every question that might come up with such a belief, God has provided sufficient evidence for us to know that creation does make sense and is meaningful. Furthermore, God's self-giving (altruistic) love is fundamentally incompatible with evolutionary thought. The manner of God's work in creation is: personal love—selfless service—life.

The manner of evolutionary process is: impersonal chance—egoism (survival of the fittest)—death. The contrast could not be greater and more drastic. The difference is obvious. There is no plausible explanation for the phenomenon of self-giving love in evolution.[44]

Furthermore, love teaches us how to deal with each other when we grow in our understanding of God's Word and His creation. It also shows us how to deal with those who no longer uphold biblical truth. Love in the biblical sense does not mean to approve and to accept everything as true and good. There is "the danger of hyper-tolerance."[45] Biblical love is exclusive in character. It has a specific content that is bound to the clear Word of God.[46] Love does not support pluralism, where conflicting truth claims are promoted side by side as equally valid expressions of truth. Love has an exclusive ring to it that makes it special and unique. But love always reaches out to all—no matter who they are and what they believe, in order to win them, to serve them, and to save them. This leads us to our next question: is theological pluralism a legitimate option for the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

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[44] Cf. Francis A. Schaeffer, *Gott ist keine Illusion*, [original title: *The God Who is There*] (Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus, 1984), 108–110, 123–126.

[45] Cf. Thomas C. Oden, *Life in the Spirit. Systematic Theology* (Peabody, MA: Prince, 2001), 3:474, 475.

[46] While it is possible to keep God's commandments without love (which is legalism), there can be no true love without the keeping of God's commandments.

Is Theological Pluralism an Option?

According to the S*eventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia,* Seventh-day Adventists "have always affirmed belief in creation *ex nihilo*" and "have generally taken it for granted that it was on the first day of Creation week that He brought into existence the matter that composed the earth and that He proceeded immediately with the work of the six days."[47] Consequently, Seventh-day Adventist "theologians and scientists reject both mechanistic and theistic evolution, on both scriptural and scientific grounds."[48] It has been claimed that on the issue of creation and evolution, ecclesiastical and intellectual realities within the Seventh-day Adventist church have changed, so that today pluralism is more evident within the church than even thirty years ago. Today we encounter "a wide range of viewpoints from flood geology to human evolution" within the church.[49] According to Delmer A. Johnson, "some people within the Adventist church think that life has existed on earth for more than six, ten, or even twelve thousand years. Some think it may have been here for as long as most geologists and paleontologists claim."[50] In light of such pluralistic positions we can speak of a "fragmentation of Adventism."[51]

Some of those who propose such pluralistic views think that a clash of doctrines is not a disaster but an opportunity.[52] According to this perspective, in the evolution of real knowledge a contradiction marks the first step in progress toward a victory. "This is one great reason for the utmost toleration of variety of opinions."[53] Thus, pluralism is espoused by some as an inevitable part of the process of secularization,[54] and as such is seen as a positive factor that attracts a broad spectrum of beliefs and is able to settle theological issues by enabling the church to transcend all differences. Pluralism is believed to be the principle by which the church would be enabled to reappraise and apply the gospel to the needs of a contemporary world. It is also being claimed that our pioneers were much more tolerant and flexible in the early phase of the Advent movement, where "as a people we are brought together from divisions of the Advent body [the Millerites], and from the various denominations, holding different views on some subjects . . ."[55] Should not a similar openness to different views—as we

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[47] S.v. "Creation," 2:417.

[48] "Evolution," in ibid., 527.

[49] James L. Hayward, "Preface," in idem., ed. *Creation Reconsidered*, 14.

[50] Delmer A. Johnson, "By the Campfire: Red Giants, White Dwarfs, Black Holes—and God," *Spectrum*, 20/1 (1990): 34.

[51] William Johnsson, *The Fragmenting of Adventism: Ten Issues Threatening the Church Today* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1995).

[52] So Alfred North Whitehead, "Religion and Science," from his book *Science and the Modern World* (New York: Macmillan, 1937), as quoted in *Creation Reconsidered*, 339.

[53] Whitehead, in *ibid*., 340.

[54] Cf. Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1967), 127–153.

[55] James White, *Review and Herald*, August 11, 1853.

face them now in the issue of creation and evolution—be characteristic of us today?

The Difference between Diversity and Pluralism. Unfortunately, the words "pluralism" and "diversity" are often confused. What is the difference between pluralism and diversity?

Pluralism. The term "pluralism" (from the Latin *pluralis,* from *plus, pluris*—"more," "more than one") expresses the idea that there are conflicting truth-claims that stand in competition with each other because there is no common basis, foundation, or starting point. There are different sources of knowledge, such as experience, reason, philosophy, naturalistic science, and Scripture. Imagine each of these sources as a tree, each bearing its own characteristic fruit. These trees stand apart from each other, each claiming to have greater importance than the others.

If there is pluralism, there will be no unity. Instead of unity we have conflicting truth claims and viewpoints within the church that lead to fragmentation, ambiguity, and doubt. If we approach the issue of creation and evolution pluralistically, the church cannot arrive at a unified understanding of truth. This might explain why within the church today unity on scriptural grounds is so difficult to achieve. Instead of standing united on the trustworthy foundation of God's written Word, conflicting viewpoints are being kept together at best by means of cultural or sociological reasons, or by appealing to our common heritage or tradition. Such humanly constructed solidarity, however, cannot bring forth a unity achievable only through the Word of God.

Diversity. The word "diversity," on the other hand, implies that there is a common basis (Scripture) on which different opinions can be approached and resolved. If there is one foundation, the Bible, then from this one commonly accepted basis will come growth in knowledge, spiritual growth, and growth in the understanding of God's nature. If we imagine Scripture as the tree of our knowledge on which these grow, we will easily understand that some fruits will not occur on a tree that has this foundation. The various fruits may be at different stages of growth. Not all will have the same color. As the apostle Paul wrote: there is "*one Lord, one faith, one baptism*" (Eph 4:5 NIV). On the basis of this **one** faith there will be unity—not pluralism. But different opinions can be tackled and resolved because the Bible is the norm for our faith.

This is exactly what James White expressed in his statement that was quoted a short while ago. James White's statement continues with these very words:

> . . . yet, thank Heaven, the Sabbath is a mighty platform on which we all shall stand united. And while standing here, with the aid of no other creed than **the word of God**, and bound together by **bonds of love**—love **for the truth**, love **for each other**, and love **for the perishing world—**'which is stronger than death', **all party feelings are lost**. We are united in these great subjects: Christ's immediate per-

> sonal second Advent, and the observance of all commandments of God, and the faith of his Son Jesus Christ, as necessary to a readiness for his Advent.[56]

Notice that for James White the Bible is the platform on which we all stand united. And the love for the truth—yes, there is such a thing as truth!—and the love for each other and for a perishing world will be stronger than any party feelings. This is also supported by Ellen G. White, who wrote:

> When God's Word is studied, comprehended, and obeyed, a bright light will be reflected to the world; new truths, received and acted upon, will bind us in strong bonds to Jesus. **The Bible, and the Bible alone, is to be our creed, the sole bond of union; all who bow to this Holy Word will be in harmony.** Our own views and ideas must not control our efforts. Man is fallible, but God's Word is infallible. Instead of wrangling with one another, let men exalt the Lord. Let us meet all opposition as did our Master, saying, "It is written." Let us lift up the banner on which is inscribed, The Bible our rule of faith and discipline.[57]

I submit to you that we can do no better than that.

The Risk of Theological Pluralism. The issue of origins has the potential to be very divisive for the Adventist Church because much is at stake. From the experience of other Christian Churches who have adopted a pluralistic position, we are now in a position to know that traditional biblical beliefs were banished under the guise of being updated. The result in these other churches has been a loss of scriptural authority, a loss of direction and purpose, a loss of discipline, a loss of a distinct message, a loss of identity, and a loss of doctrinal continuity.[58] "In adopting pluralism in their belief system, the above-described churches [The United Methodist Church, The United Church of Christ, The United Presbyterian Church in the United States] not only reduced the strength of their belief-system or *message*, but also lost motivation and effectiveness in accomplishing the *mission* of the Christian church."[59] Katherine Ching concludes her remarkable study on the practice of theological pluralism by stating:

> Churches that have allowed theological pluralism to dominate 'peripheral' doctrinal beliefs have discovered that it gradually sways *all* doctrinal interpretation, finally leading to theological indifference and intolerance of firm doctrinal standards . . . commitment to theological pluralism becomes an empty, substitute faith, a virtue in itself, while authoritative principles and standards are trampled in its path. Theological pluralism does not appear to be a solution. Not only does it

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[56] James White, *Review and Herald*, 4/52 (August, 11, 1853); emphasis added.

[57] Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, December 15, 1885 (1SM, 416); emphasis added.

[58] Cf. Katherine Ching, "The Practice of Theological Pluralism," *Adventist Perspectives*, 5/1 (1991): 6–11.

[59] Ching, 10.

> perpetuate and intensify a church's problems, it threatens its very life and existence.[60]

If this is true of "peripheral" doctrinal beliefs, how much more is this the case with such a central and foundational doctrine as creation? More recently, Ariel Roth has pointed out that many Christian churches that have slowly and insidiously adopted various ideas about life's progressive development have abandoned their high priority on biblical truth and often have had a loss in membership. "It is particularly difficult to convince people that Christianity is for real when churches consider the Bible to be in error, especially with respect to the important question of origins."[61] Taking these experiences seriously, it is not advisable to foster theological pluralism in the Seventh-day Adventist church, particularly not on the issue of creation-evolution.

The Source and Foundation of Our Unity. Our NO to theological pluralism springs from our YES to Jesus Christ as our only savior and from His YES to the historicity of the biblical creation account. Jesus upheld the trustworthiness of Scripture, even when it refers to people and events.[62] By upholding the biblical account of creation, we declare that we believe and need a message that is distinct from the widespread and popular account of the origin of life as espoused by evolutionary hypotheses.

How Can we Deal With Conflicts Between Science and Scripture?

How do we deal with unresolved questions that are raised by the natural sciences? What attitude and disposition is necessary to uphold the biblical account of creation when it is challenged by science? Without claiming to be exhaustive, I submit the following characteristics of such an attitude[63]:

Allow for a Creative Tension Between Scripture and Science. Facts that seem to be contradictory to biblical statements should not be ignored or denied. Neither should they be colored or glossed over. It is not necessary to support biblical truth by coloring facts. This is not acceptable, and we have no moral mandate to do so. Neither do we have the right to color our interpretation of Scripture in order to adapt it to the scientific level of the day. To allow for a "creative tension" indicates that we are called to search for a solution that is faithful to Scripture and impartial in its scientific investigation.

Resist the Temptation of Superficial Answers. To search for solutions that are at once faithful to Scripture and impartial in their scientific investigation

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[60] Ching, 11.

[61] Ariel Roth, "Adventism and the Challenges to Creation," *Adventists Affirm*, 16/1 (2002): 20.

[62] Cf. John Wenham, *Christ and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994).

[63] Cf. Reinhard Junker, "Die Glaubwürdigkeit der Bibel und die Schöpfungsordnung," in Stephan Holthaus and Karl-Heinz Vanheiden, eds., *Die Unfehlbarkeit und Irrtumslosigkeit der Bibel* (Nürnberg: Verlag für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft, 2002), 137ff. Cf. Also Frank M. Hasel, "Presuppositions in the Interpretation of Scripture," forthcoming chapter in a book on Biblical Hermeneutics, published by the Biblical Research Institute.

means that we have to resist the temptation to provide shallow answers and superficial solutions that do not do justice to very complex and multifaceted issues. Shallow answers and superficial solutions do not satisfy and will in the end do a disservice to the church and to biblical faith. In order to search for such answers, we need to possess some other important attitudes.

Honesty. Let us deal with every difficulty we encounter with perfect honesty. Honesty implies that we first of all acknowledge a difficulty and do not try to obscure or dodge it.[64] Perfect honesty and frankness always wins out in the long run. An honest person has an open mindset and is willing to learn. It is a mindset that is receptive and open toward the message and content of what is being studied. Honesty aims at the motives with which the interpreter and scientist approaches the biblical text and the field of science and also includes the openness to use the proper methods of investigation. Everyone has to face the question: Are my motives in harmony with the Word of God? Are my methods appropriate for the subject matter of science and also of Scripture? God is "pleased with integrity" (1 Chr 19:17 NIV). If we are really convinced that the Bible is the Word of God, is reliable in what it affirms, and can be trusted, we are far better off to wait for an honest solution to a perplexing difficulty than to submit a solution that is evasive or unsatisfactory. Honesty turns away from all lies. And honesty includes a faithfulness to God that results in an independence from presuppositions of naturalistic science that run counter to God's Word, no matter how widespread and popular such science might be. While we will not share atheistic premises of naturalistic science, honesty calls us to be fair and respectful to those who work on those premises.

Patience. Complex problems require untiring patience and an indomitable determination to deal with every difficulty we meet. We have to be determined that no matter how much time and study and hard thinking it may require, we will patiently work on finding a solution. As Bible-believing Christians, we have to recognize that especially in the scientific investigation of creation, there are only limited resources and manpower available to deal with enormous questions and challenges. The number of scientists who believe in biblical creation is small (but growing), and therefore the results are limited. To study some of those (complex) problems, it would be helpful to investigate them in our own laboratories, to conduct our own field-studies in order to collect primary data, to do our own research, etc. This is a costly endeavor and needs to be done systematically. It would be an important signal, however, if the Seventh-day Adventist Church would support such efforts in various ways and thus contribute to the task of finding reliable answers that are scientifically sound, thorough, and yet faithful to the biblical view of creation, not compromising the clear statements of Scripture and of Ellen G. White on creation. With such a proactive approach,

[64] This is true for both sides of the debate. There has been obscurantism among proponents of biblical creation as well as obscurantism and evasion of difficulties on the side of evolutionists.

the Adventist Church has the potential to make a real contribution to our own church members and to the Christian world at large that would help to gain credibility and respect for a message that we are called to proclaim before Jesus will come again. And if some difficulties persistently defy even our hardest efforts to solve them, we should not get discouraged. It is interesting to note that one characteristic of the faithful believers at the end of history is to live patiently. "*Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus*" (Rev 14:12 NAS). The call to perseverance is made in Rev 14 in the context of clear references to creation and the flood (v. 7).[65] Part of our perseverance is to be able to live with open questions, yet be faithful to God's Word. For God's Word has proved to be reliable and trustworthy.

Humility. Humility is one the rarest characteristics among those engaged in the study of science, theology,[66] or both, yet it is very important. In the attitude of humility is expressed the willingness and modesty to submit one's beliefs to a higher authority. Humility expresses the unassuming insight that God and His Word are greater than our human reason and even greater than our current understanding of science.[67] Every difficulty we encounter in the relationship between the Bible and science should be considered with that humility that becomes all persons of such limited knowledge as we are. Recognizing the limitations of our own mind and our human knowledge, we should not suppose that there is no solution just because we have not yet found any.

Recognize the Limited Nature of Scientific Knowledge. In dealing with difficulties that are posed by science to Scripture, we have to acknowledge that in our explanation of the distant past we do not have all the information available that we would like to have in order to solve a difficult question. At the same time we have to recognize that our scientific knowledge of things is very limited. It has been pointed out that no science can explain everything.[68] This is

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[65] Cf. John T. Baldwin, "Revelation 14:7: An Angel's Worldview," in John T. Baldwin, ed., *Creation, Catastrophe and Calvary* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 19–39, esp. 19–28.

[66] Augustine reports that the well-known teacher of rhetoric in antiquity, Demosthenes, once was asked: what is the chief rule in eloquence? He replied: "Delivery"; when asked: what is the second rule? he answered: "Delivery"; and what is the third rule? "Delivery" was the response. Augustine then added: "so if you ask me concerning the precepts of the Christian religion, first, second, third, and always I would answer, 'Humility'" (quoted in Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II, 2, 11, 268–269. The anecdote is told of Demosthenes by Quintilian, *Institution oratoria* XI. Iii. 6 [LCL Quintilian IV. 244f]. For its use in Augustine, see his *Letters* cxiii. 3. 22 [*MPL* 33. 442; tr. *FC* 18. 282]).

[67] This subordination of human reason to the higher authority of God's Word is expressed in these words: "God desires man to exercise his reasoning powers . . . yet we are to be aware of deifying reason which is subject to the infirmity of humanity. . . . when we come to the Bible, reason must acknowledge an authority superior to itself, and heart and intellect must bow to the great I AM" (Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1892), 109ff.

[68] Cf. John Lennox, 18–26.

especially the case when we have to deal with primordial issues. We may learn from archeology that the absence of evidence is no evidence for the absence of what has not yet been found. Our limited knowledge of those things becomes evident already in a question God asks Job: "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth! Tell Me, if you have understanding" (Job 38:4 NAS). It is with the awareness of those human limitations and boundaries that we investigate God's creation scientifically, always being conscious that our knowledge is restricted.

Even though scientific explanations at times might seem omnipotent, we do have to recognize the fact that scientific theories are influenced by philosophical presuppositions[69] and that scientific knowledge can be revised and changed.[70] Science is no infallible absolute.[71] Science builds on empirical knowledge, and this means that new data can question scientific theories. Where this is no longer allowed, science has mutated into an ideology.

Be Open to the Fact that God Intervenes. In dealing with problems at the interface between faith and science as biblical theologians and believing scientists, we have to be open to the fact that God intervenes supernaturally and that such a supernatural intervention cannot be explained with normal natural processes as we know them in the sciences. To speak with Shakespeare's Hamlet: "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy."[72] To be open to God's supernatural intervention also encompasses a spiritual approach to difficulties where every difficulty is dealt with prayerfully. Prayer is no substitute for diligent and hard work. But on the other hand, we should never underestimate what God can do to our understanding of Scripture and nature through prayer.

Learning from Love. Love has convincing evidence that leads to conviction. But love does not have a 100% mathematical or scientific proof for it. After all, there is more to love than scientific evidence. Love is a supernatural gift. Therefore, love is able to endure. And love is able to live with open questions. While we now may see dimly, nevertheless we do see. And we "*may be able* ***to comprehend*** *with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and* ***to know*** *the love of Christ* ***which surpasses knowledge***" (Eph

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[69] Cf. Hansjürgen Staudinger, "Wider den naturwissenschaftlichen Monismus," in Willi Oelmüller, ed., *Philosophie und Wissenschaft* (Munich: Ferdinand Schönigh, 1988), 40–46. Cf. Hans Michael Baumgartner, "Humanities und Sciences. Ein Beitrag der Philosophie zum Thema Philosophie und Wissenschaft," in idem., 33–39.

[70] Cf. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, second rev. ed. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1970). For a critical analysis and evaluation of Thomas Kuhn's concept of paradigm and paradigm change, see Frank M. Hasel, "Scientific Revolutions: An Analysis and Evaluation of Thomas Kuhn's Concept of Paradigm and Paradigm Change for Theology," in *JATS*, 2/2 (1991): 160–177; and idem., "Thomas Kuhn's Revolution: A New Way of Looking At Science," *College and University Dialogue* 4/2 (1992): 11–13.

[71] Cf. Reinhard Junker, 138–139.

[72] William Shakespeare, "Hamlet," I, 5.

3:18–19 NAS, emphasis added). Thus, while we do understand what God has revealed to us, it is our hope that we "*will come to understand fully*" (2 Cor 1:14 NIV). In other words, love is the epistemological basis for knowing and trusting. Love is the basis of our faith, and it is the foundation of our hope ("*it hopes all things*" 1 Cor 13:7 NAS). "*Love never fails*" (1 Cor 13:8 NAS). "*And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more* ***in real knowledge*** *and all discernment*" (Phil 1:9 NAS; emphasis added).

While there are some questions that are still unresolved from a creationist perspective, this does not invalidate the position of biblical creation. Let us not forget that not everything is up in the air and unresolved. There are foundational issues that are very clear and beyond the shadow of a doubt. Furthermore, we should be aware of the fact that there are a good many tough questions unresolved for the hypothesis of evolution as well, and it seems as if some of those difficult questions for evolution do not diminish but grow more vexed as time goes on.

Is Pluralism an Option?

It was the great French mathematician and theologian Blaise Pascal (1623–1662) who once remarked that "we must know where to doubt, where to feel certain, where to submit. He who does not do so understands not the force of reason." Pascal continued, "there are some who offend against these rules . . . by doubting everything, from want of knowing where to submit."[73] While we do not have all the answers to some of our questions, and while it is necessary to remain humble and open to learn new things, it is also true that God has already revealed many foundational aspects of his creation that are very clear. I submit that we have to uphold those clear statements of Scripture and from there try to shed more light on some issues where we do not yet have all the solutions.[74] In light of those clear concepts of Scripture, any theological pluralism that allows diametrically opposed worldviews and explanations as equally valid within the church will prove to be disastrous. Biblical creation and evolution are not compatible. In questions of ultimate significance and importance, as is the case with the biblical doctrine of creation, which touches upon our origin, the meaning of

[73] Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*, Section IV, "On the Means of Belief," #267–269 (1660), trans. W. F. Trotter. The complete statement reads as follows: "267. The last proceeding of reason is to recognize that there is an infinity of things, which are beyond it. It is but feeble if it does not see so far as to know this. But if natural things are beyond it, what will be said of supernatural? 268. Submission—we must know where to doubt, where to feel certain, where to submit. He who does not do so understands not the force of reason. There are some who offend against these three rules, either by affirming everything as demonstrative, from want of knowing what demonstration is; or by doubting everything, from want of knowing where to submit; or by submitting in everything, from want of knowing where they must judge. 269. Submission is the use of reason in which consists true Christianity."

[74] To move from clear statements to less clear statements and not vice versa is a sound hermeneutical principle.

life, the end of all life, that impinges upon dominant biblical themes like eschatology, salvation, the dignity and nature of mankind, the trustworthiness of Scripture, the nature of God, God's acting in history, the meaning of history, and much more, it is devastating to allow for conflicting pluralism and not to uphold the clear and unequivocal teaching of God's Word on biblical creation.

Unlike water, where hot and cold can be mixed and the result still will be water—albeit "lukewarm" water—that somehow might be drinkable,[75] pluralism in theology produces an unbearable confusion and chaos that compromises God's clear truth as it is revealed in Scripture. In the church, theological pluralism has very detrimental effects on doctrine, mission, and growth.[76] To encourage pluralism in this area will result only in misunderstanding, perplexity, ambiguity, and doubt. Theological pluralism does not help the church gain a greater sense of certainty. Instead, it will multiply uncertainty and foster confusion.

While we do not want to indoctrinate anybody in the sense of manipulating others to adopt our understanding of scriptural doctrines, we do have the responsibility to provide clear guidance and unambiguous orientation for those who attend our educational institutions and churches. As Adventist teachers, pastors, journalists, thought leaders, and those who are responsible to the church in leadership positions (administrators), we have a sacred commission and responsibility before God to pass on correct biblical doctrine that has a specific biblical content. What we teach, preach, and publish will shape the thoughts and lives of countless students and church members as well as seekers of the faith. Let us not banish clear biblical beliefs under the guise of updating them in order to make them more relevant to contemporary thinking and society. It was well known theologian George Lindbeck, from Yale University, who pointed out some time ago that it is a mistake to believe that the gospel has ever been spread by trying to make it more relevant to the people through adapting it to new terms and concepts. According to Lindbeck, in the early days of the Christian Church it was the Gnostic heretics who rewrote the biblical material according to a new understanding.[77] And we know that emperor Constantine did not fare any better when he began to make the biblical message attractive to those who were distant to the faith. Lindbeck correctly points out that the beginning of the conversion process from heathenism to Christian faith was the fascination of the non-believer with a Christian lifestyle that was practiced honestly and lived convincingly. This led

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[75] We are aware that any comparison is deficient. A "lukewarm" state of being is not favored by God, who calls for a decided stand for his cause: "*I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I would that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth"* (Rev 3:15–16 NAS).

[76] Cf. Katherine Ching, "The Practice of Theological Pluralism," *Adventist Perspectives*, 5/1 (1991): 6–11; and more recently, Ariel A. Roth, "Adventism and the Challenges to Creation" *Adventists Affirm*, 16/1 (2002): 19–21.

[77] George A. Lindbeck, "Theologische Methode und Wissenschaftstheorie," in *Theologische Revue* 74/4 (1978): 278.

the unbelievers into a long process of instruction (catechism) in which they began to understand the Christian language, which was foreign to them before, and where they learned to think biblically. Only after they had given proof that they had understood Christian concepts and thinking were they allowed to join the church in baptism.[78]

In affirming the biblical doctrine of creation amidst theological pluralism and in a pluralistic world, we have the sacred responsibility to use the language we employ unambiguously. It seems as if in the past so-called "progressive" theologians did not attack traditional views of creation openly within our church. Instead they "used traditional terminology and concepts but infused them with new meaning."[79] It has been pointed out that "it may have taken a while for conservatives to sense that although the words and the symbols were familiar, the theological perspective was new."[80] Today, as we deal with these important issues, there is a great need for theological honesty and for linguistic precision so that our words do not empty the biblical doctrine of creation of its biblical meaning and convey something unbiblical instead.

While it is good to listen to those who are trained and educated in scholarship and science, we should not fall prey to the wrong thinking that only scientifically trained people and those who teach religion are able to discover correctly God's truth about creation. As theologians and scientists who work for the church and are employed by church owned institutions, we are responsible to the whole church, and we are representatives of all church members, not just our own academic peer group. We believe in the priesthood of all believers—not the high-priesthood of the scientist and theologian who holds a Ph.D. and is knowledgeable about historical and scientific analysis. Any such assumption is arrogant and even insulting to others because it does not adequately reflect the possibility and reality of the Holy Spirit leading the whole church into God's truth.

It is my hope that the ideas presented in this article will stimulate and motivate all of us to search for better answers, answers that will prove to be convincing and at the same time are in full harmony with God's written Word. Only then will we honor God and bring glory to He who created this world through His powerful Word.

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[78] Lindbeck, 278.
[79] Lugenbeal, "The Conservative Restoration at Geoscience," *Spectrum*, 15/2 (1984): 23.
[80] Lugenbeal, ibid.