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What Is an Adventist? Someone Who Upholds Creation

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Introduction

A well-known Seventh-day Adventist wrote to me the following: “In the last several decades such a large amount of scientific evidence has accumulated as to make it virtually impossible to defend our two positions: 1) That life on earth has been here only around six to ten thousand years; and 2) that all life forms were created within a six day period.” Then, he proceeded to explain the lines of scientific evidence which caused such a shift in his personal convictions.

Are we as Seventh-day Adventists, entitled to believe whatever science offers concerning the origin of life on earth? What does our faith in God involve? The name “*Seventh-day Adventist*” is linked to the belief in a divine origin of life in our world. We not only accept as important to the truth that God created the world, but we accept that “How He did it,” and “How long ago,” and “How long it took Him” are also important facts. Theistic evolutionists and progressive creationists do not regard these latter matters as important. Furthermore, our name “*Seventh-day Adventist*” points to the future as well as the past. It implies the acceptance of an eschatological mission and destiny. In fact, our beliefs regarding the past and the

TERREROS: WHAT IS AN ADVENTIST?

future of our world go hand in hand, for our protology in great measure affects our eschatology.

Since the term “creation” nowadays is employed to indicate any beginning of matter and/or life in the cosmos, including the “big bang theory,” it is necessary to define my usage. In this article the term will refer to God’s action which originated the heavens and the earth (and all that is on it) as described in the opening chapters of Genesis.

The truths held by Seventh-day Adventists—being deeply connected with the creation account—are also central to the great controversy between God and Satan. Widespread belief in the evolution of life is one of the strongholds of the enemy. Looking to the past, we see God is denied His creatorship. Looking to the future, through prophecy, we see that Satan, through his agents, will contend for the supreme worship which only our Creator deserves.

As Seventh-day Adventists we need to examine more intently our beliefs within the framework of our mission to the world. We believe that the message we have been given to proclaim “constitutes the greatest bulwark against the progress of the theory of evolution.”¹

Non-negotiable Creation-Related Beliefs

Although virtually all our beliefs have a theological connection with the truth of creation, we summarize only a few of them, starting with those foundational to our name.

The Advent. The word “Adventist,” describes a believer who awaits the second advent of Christ. According to the Scriptures He for whose advent we are waiting (Titus 2:13) is none other than the Creator of the world, by whom “all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible. . .” (Col 1:16).²

Protology and eschatology are so linked that the latter is dependent on the former. Adventists would have no right, biblically speaking, to expect the Advent to end the world, unless He who is coming is the Creator of the world. Furthermore, the annihilation of the wicked at the close of history will be carried out by the authority

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

which the Creator of life reserves for Himself: the authority to take life away from those He judges unworthy to retain it (Ps 102:25-27; John 17:2). In addition, the Second Advent initiates a new order of things in the universe only because He who comes is able to originate a “very good” creation (Gen 1:31; John 1:1-3, 10), even out of nothing (Heb 11:3).

It is precisely because of this biblical truth that Seventh-day Adventists believe the redemption of humanity will materialize not through the improvement of this present world but through the creation of a new one. That is why our hope is so embracing. We wait for the Advent of the Creator. The Redeemer is the Creator. Thus, He can promise, “the old order of things has passed away. . . I am making everything new!” And we, in turn, can trust that “these words are trustworthy and true” (Rev 21: 4, 5).

The Sabbath. Creation is the visible and tangible revelation of the Creator’s “eternal power and divine nature” (Rom 1:19-20). The seventh-day Sabbath, as a worship form, memorializes God’s creatorship and functions also as a sign of His redemptive grace (Ezek 20:12).

Seventh-day Adventists celebrate these two truths every week. In the first place, we celebrate the creation of ourselves, our fellow humans and all other forms of life, and the planet we inhabit. In the second place, we celebrate our redemption from sin and our liberation from every yoke, including our “freedom from bondage to other people.”³ The Sabbath is a proper symbol of both.

Observing the Sabbath is a powerful exaltation of God as the Lord of life. Ellen White has written: “Had the Sabbath always been sacredly observed, there could never have been an atheist or an idolater.”⁴ Just by keeping the Sabbath holy, without any additional proclamation, every Seventh-day Adventist believer is exalting God, testifying that He made the world in six days and rested on the seventh. Sabbath observance also testifies to God’s love for humankind in providing for His children each week a day for rest and

TERREROS: WHAT IS AN ADVENTIST?

special fellowship (Mark 2:27). By worshiping on the Sabbath, we Adventists demonstrate our personal convictions that God is responsible for the existence of the natural world and likewise deny the commonly held evolutionary hypothesis.

Jesus Christ. In our denominational name, the term “Adventist,” far from implying the exaltation of a doctrine, implies the exaltation of a person, Jesus Christ. We are waiting for Christ’s coming. It is the Person who gives relevance to both the event and the belief, not the other way around. An Adventist believes that Jesus Christ was the active Agent in God’s creation (John 1:1-2; Col 1:16; Heb 1:1-2), and that He is the Sustainer of His creation (Col 1:17; Heb 1:3). He is both the Creator and the Redeemer. In the process of redemption, Jesus Christ exercises the same creating power evidenced in the creation of the world (Eph 4:20-24; Col 3:9-10). Every new born creature in the kingdom of God is renewed in the image of and by the power of his Creator.

And, as with the Second Advent, so it is for Adventists concerning Sabbath-keeping. The day is important because of the Person we adore and with whom we fellowship within its hours. Sunday does not hold the same significance as a day of worship for Seventh-day Adventists because it was established by created beings. The Sabbath on the other hand was set apart by the Creator. Its recurrence week after week bears witness to the constancy of the Creator’s sustaining power.

Sola Scriptura. “Seventh-day Adventists fully support the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura*, the Bible as its own interpreter and the Bible alone as the basis of all doctrines.”⁵ The Scriptures are the embodiment of God’s revelation to humanity in written form, and both the study of the original creation as well as of nature in its present state need to be interpreted by the revelation in Scriptures.

Creation and other origin-related issues fall beyond the scope of the scientific inquiry in that they are unique. They cannot be repeated

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

in a controlled situation and tested as scientific methodology requires. Besides, there were no human witnesses present. The only witnesses were divine and celestial beings. That is why God's given revelation is indispensable if we are to comprehend creation. We cannot understand it from the insights gained by science without the aid of biblical history. Regarding this point, Ellen G. White writes:

I have been shown that without Bible history, geology can prove nothing. Relics found in the earth give evidence of a state of things differing in many respects from the present. But the time of their existence, and how long a period these things have been in the earth, are only to be understood by Bible history. It may be innocent to conjecture beyond Bible history, if our suppositions do not contradict the facts found in the sacred Scriptures. But when men leave the word of God in regard to the history of creation, and seek to account for God's creative works upon natural principles, they are upon a boundless ocean of uncertainty.⁶

Faith. Adventists accept by faith the facts and history of creation as recorded in Scripture. We exercise faith in the biblical record, but not because there are no evidences on which to base our convictions. In fact, one of our convictions is that "God never asks us to believe, without giving sufficient evidence upon which to base our faith."⁷ For us, nature's testimony about its supernatural origin is compelling (Rom 1:19-20) and appeals to our reason. At the same time, however, we Adventists understand that it is not possible for finite minds to comprehend fully the works of the infinite One, beginning with such a unique work as is creation.⁸

God's revelation, which accounts for the origin of all things, is understood and accepted by faith. It is by faith that "we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible" (Heb 11:3). Such faith has a firm foundation: God's word which is trustworthy because it is based on His character, and He is faithful (1 Pet 4:19). His faithfulness is made evident in the stability of the laws of His creation.

TERREROS: WHAT IS AN ADVENTIST?

Recent, Six-Day, *Ex nihilo* Creation

A Recent Creation. Adventists believe that all forms of life were created by God, but we do not stop there. We do not believe that as long as God is accepted as Creator, the “How” He created, the “How long ago,” and the “How long it took Him to create,” are not important. We perceive these are interrelated issues which speak to the character and power of a personal Creator.

Bible passages about creation indicate that it was an awesome miracle performed in a very short period of time (see Gen 1:3, cf. 2 Cor 4:6a; Gen 1:6-7, 9, 24, 26-27, etc.; Ps 33:8-9). Someone has suggested that if we inject a long time into any of God's miracles, we spoil it, and it is then no longer a miracle.⁹

But Scripture does not only indicate that the miracle of creation was performed in a short period of time. Through its genealogical listings and its naming of generations traced back to Adam, the first human being, it strongly indicates that the creation occurred not long ago, as compared to the claims of evolution. And so, we Adventists accept the account of a recent creation on the basis of the credibility of God's supreme revelation, Scripture. And we believe also on the basis of the credibility of God's recent revelation through the visions and writings of Ellen G. White,¹⁰ which likewise emphasize that creation took place approximately six thousand years ago.

In order to counterbalance the tremendous discrepancy between the Bible and science regarding the age of the earth, in recent years some Adventist scientists have suggested (the idea itself may not be new) that while life on the earth is very young, the planet itself is very old, as old as radiometric dating says it is. The suggestion leads to an interpretation of Genesis in which the basic, rocky planet is created in the very distant past, but the organization of the earth and the creation of life on it takes place only six to ten millennia ago. I want to stress that things could have happened that way. However, some questions (and they are only questions) arise:

First, Genesis 1:1-2 declares that when God created the earth it

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

was “formless and empty,” while Isaiah 45:18 observes “he did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited” (cf. 45:12). The question is, Why should the earth be left empty for 4.5 billion years (according to evolutionary dating for the earth’s rocks) and be inhabited only for around six thousand years, if God “did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited”?

Genesis 1, as traditionally read, implies that God created the earth, and quite soon thereafter (in harmony with His purpose for the planet to be inhabited) created humanity on it. This seems to be more consistent with His way of acting in the rest of the Bible than is the option of leaving His declared purpose unfulfilled for billions of years (See Isa 46:116).¹¹

Second, since evolutionary science usually dates the fossils by the rocks or strata in which they are found, the question is, How consistent and defensible is the basis upon which some Adventists accept evolutionary science’s age for the rocks while rejecting its age for the fossils (hence for life) contained therein?

Third, the suggestion under consideration implies a discontinuity between Genesis 1:1 and verse 2 similar to that proposed by Gap theorists. But are we aware of what the acceptance of such a gap (passive, granted) really entails? Is this not the result of a rather broad concordist endeavor to harmonize Scripture and Science?¹² The point is, we are being forced to accept the gap by science, not by Scripture.

“One thing is certain,” writes evangelical author Clark Pinnock about evangelical Christians. “They did not find out about an ancient earth from reading Genesis.”¹³ And, if we are willing to inject a long period of time between verses 1 and 2, why not accept the Gap Theory’s other suggestions as to what happened during that period?¹⁴

Fourth, what shall we do with verse 2? Shall we consider it a thought unit with verse 1 or with verse 3? In either combination we have a difficulty. In the first case, we face the theological problem of having the Spirit of God “hovering over the waters” for millions or billions of years to no effect. This is in no way a typical result of the

TERREROS: WHAT IS AN ADVENTIST?

Spirit's activity. When the Spirit intervenes something happens, a change of conditions, a renewal takes place. As the psalmist expresses it, "When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth" (Ps 104:30).

In the second case, we face a grammatical problem. Verse 2 contains three substantival clauses whose fundamental function in Hebrew is to express something fixed, a state, and not to mark becoming, progression, or sequence in action.¹⁵ So the text would not allow us to conclude that the Spirit was not hovering over the waters for the eons elapsed since "the beginning" but entered into action only at the beginning of creation week initiated just a few thousand years ago.

Six Literal Days. Several Creation theories have been proposed in the past to harmonize the biblical account with the long periods of time all branches of evolution require.¹⁶ Even the improbable "vision theory" has been argued—that God took six days to reveal the creation account to Moses.¹⁷

A literal six-day creation is important to the framework of the great moral controversy between God and Satan. In the course of this contest Satan's greatest efforts center on inducing humanity to rebel against God and to disobey His law. To achieve his objective, he attacks God's right as Creator to govern the universe and to require obedience to His moral law. That explains why Satan's efforts are specially aimed at the fourth commandment. It is the precept which clearly points to the God of the Scriptures as the living Creator of heaven and earth¹⁸ and calls for the observance of the Sabbath on the basis that "in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day" (Exod 20:11).

Only a creation in six 24-hour days gives Seventh-day Adventists the basis for Sabbath keeping and for their denominational name. No astronomical rationale exists for the time cycle known as the week as it does for the day, the month, or the year; the seven-day week is,

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

apparently, a capricious arrangement. But an original creation in six literal days gives Adventists a satisfactory explanation for the origin of the week. For God to order human beings to labor six literal days in memory of six vast and indefinite periods of time is entirely inconsistent with the method He uses to relate to His creatures.¹⁹

***Ex nihilo* Creation.** Adventists accept an *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) creation, for it is in harmony with both the power of God and the testimony of His written Word. For Adventists, “biblical creation is true creation”²⁰ in the strictest sense of the word. Even though some of the terms used denote no more than fashioning or making, the creation described in the OT, “is more than manufacture or artistic arrangement on the assumption of existing material,” and NT passages “leave no place for preexistent matter.”²¹ The Author of such a creation “is not just an architect or builder who works with what is at hand,”²² rather, “This is what the Lord says—Israel’s King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty: I am the first and the last; apart from me there is no God” (Isa 44:6). God antedates any matter. He is the first Cause of all things.

Based on this belief, Adventists cannot accept alternative explanations of origins offered by even theistic views of evolution.²³ We see biblical creation and such views as being mutually exclusive from the perspective of a literal reading of the creation texts. Evolution means “modification,” while creation means absolute “origination.” In the ultimate sense of these terms, as Benjamin Warfield once put it, “You cannot ‘originate’ by ‘modifying;’ you cannot ‘modify’ by ‘originating.’”²⁴ Therefore, whatever comes by “evolution” cannot arise by “creation,” and whatever is “created” is ultimately not “evolved.”²⁵ This dictum is particularly true as it applies to the origin of life on our planet.²⁶

Adventists accept the Scriptural dictum that it is “by faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible” (Heb 11:3). It is suggested in some Adventist circles that God did not create *ex-nihilo*

TERREROS: WHAT IS AN ADVENTIST?

in the strict sense of the term. Texts like Hebrews 11:3, it is argued, imply that what God did at creation was to convert energy (an invisible phenomenon) into matter. But, Why insist on reducing creation to transformation²⁷ in making God create only from preexistent elements? Is this not limiting God? In biblical terms only God is eternal. Not even energy is eternal, for God created *ta panta* (“all things. . . visible and invisible,” Col 1:16; cf. Eph 3:9; Rev 4:11; John 1:3). And it is He who gives life to everything (Neh 9:6).

Adventists accept the truth of a creation out of nothing because the God we believe in is the Creator who is able to call “things that are not as though they were” (Rom 4:17; cf. 1 Cor 1:28). As Ellen White writes, “In the formation of our world God was not indebted to pre-existing matter. On the contrary, all things, material or spiritual, stood up before the Lord Jehovah at His voice and were created for His own purpose. . . by the breath of His mouth.”²⁸

Denial of Bible Creation: Theological Implication

The denial of the Bible’s creation accounts in any degree has serious implications for Adventist theology. We review in this section of the article, by way of illustration, the impact such a denial would have on some selected Adventist beliefs:

The Character of God. It is true that our understanding of God will affect our understanding of creation; but the reverse is also true. Our understanding of creation will impact our view of God. That is why it is important for Adventist Christians to have correct views regarding creation. Those views have implications for our theology.²⁹ For example, a materialist who holds to the eternity of matter, God is a contingency but not a necessity. For the idealist’s conception of natural phenomena as the reflection of Mind (God), Mind is identical with the creation, the universe.

For believers in an evolutionary origin of life who want to retain their faith in God, “evolution is the manifestation of the work of God in nature.”³⁰ Usually, however, in such a belief, the creativity and

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

dependability ascribed to natural mechanisms is such that the whole process of evolution could have worked without God, or that God had to be dependant on something outside of Himself. One problem in the view of evolution as God's method of working in the world is that it compels the consistent thinker to perceive God as being finite, "a God who takes steps."³¹

To dispense with the necessity for an infinite, all-powerful God, however, implies the denial of Bible truth, a serious doctrinal implication if we hold the theory of evolution.³² God's demand of adoration and reverence above pagan deities is based on the fact that He is the only creator God, and hence, the only true God, who cannot be compared to any other god (Isa 40:25-26; Jer 10:10-16).

God's divinity is made evident in His capacity to originate *ex nihilo*. This is a very important truth in connection with the controversy between God and Satan. The latter will never be able to create in the absolute sense of the term for he is not God (though he wanted to be); he is a creature. Satan can "create," beginning with what God has done, but not out of nothing. This remains an exclusive right of the Almighty. His great power is perceived through the works of His hands (Rom 1:20).

The question, even when in theistic-evolutionary thought God is consistently retained, is, Can the nature and character of a God who uses evolution (with its struggle for survival due to scarcity of resources) as His method of creation be reconciled with the biblical portrait of a God who is constantly concerned with and generously providing for His creation?³³

Redemption. Adventists understand that if creation is in any way denied, evolution is affirmed as the alternative for explaining the origin of life. And this is not new. Ever since Darwin, evolutionary theory has offered for numerous theologians the hope of a realistic redescription of the traditional doctrine,³⁴ including the Fall, sin, and the atonement. The redescription has sought to make Christian doctrine correspond with evolutionary theory. Nonetheless, the fact

TERREROS: WHAT IS AN ADVENTIST?

is that Darwin has “made the problem worse.”³⁵

This is particularly evident in theistic evolutionary theory, which transfers the responsibility for sin from man to God, and in so doing, alters the doctrinal basis for the need of the atonement. Thus, the question phrased in John Brooke’s words is, “If man had risen, not fallen, what would be left of the scheme of redemption?”³⁶

As someone who favors that worldview has said it, “in evolution there is no place for a first human being nor for an original sin.”³⁷ The “Fall” is either denied,³⁸ neutralized as of no significant import,³⁹ or reinterpreted as a rise⁴⁰ within the ever progressing continuum of the evolutionary process; in this context, imperfection and evil become “concomitant with a world that is ‘becoming.’”⁴¹ Thus the fall of man, by the first human sin, ceases to be the basis for the human need of salvation. Such a position wields a strong blow to the biblical teaching on the plan of redemption.⁴²

We repeat, if evolution is true, and not the biblical account of creation, then there was no Fall, and therefore, no causal linkage between sin and death, which implies no Redeemer for sin is needed⁴³ to save humanity from death.⁴⁴ Thus, humans are not fallen, but are simply the end result of their animal ancestry, meaning that the process of evolution can act as a savior, rendering Christ’s sacrifice unnecessary.

The Authority of Scriptures. For Seventh-day Adventists, life in all areas is ruled by the principle of *sola scriptura*. This is for us a very crucial area, because the validity of our beliefs depends on the reliability of the Bible. It is equally important because “the issue of biblical authority (not scientific methodology) provides the proper context for understanding the current creationism-evolution controversy.”⁴⁵

The conclusions reached by modern science (usually worked out under evolutionary premises) if adopted will deeply affect the Adventist approach to and understanding of the Bible. For example, accepting a connection between modern man and earlier hominids

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

requires that the narrative in Genesis 2 concerning the creation of man from the dust of the ground be taken as metaphorical or symbolic⁴⁶ or, eventually, that confidence in the reliability of the Bible be totally given up.

Edward J. Carnell's reasoning illustrates this point. He writes that since orthodoxy has given up the literal-day interpretation of the creation story "out of respect for geology," it would forfeit no principle if it gave up the belief in a recent creation "out of respect for paleontology."⁴⁷ This is precisely what not only evangelicals,⁴⁸ but also some Adventists are doing, as illustrated in the introduction to this present article.

Seventh-day Adventists who hold to the authority of the Scriptures should be aware of the danger of measuring biblical data by scientific models, evidences, and facts, instead of evaluating these by the Bible. We should be conscious that this is, in Conrad Hyers' words, a downhill road, a process which once started is very difficult to stop short of conceding everything.⁴⁹ Accordingly, evangelical scholar Paul K. Jewett affirms that most Christians would not "suppose that the creation of the earth as we now know it consisted of a series of instantaneous events—creation by simple *fiat*."⁵⁰ Jewett also writes that today "few who confess the Christian doctrine of Creation would suppose that the world was fashioned in a week of time some six to ten thousand years ago."

By contrast, Adventists interpret the testimony of the Bible to be describing an almighty God (Gen 17:1; Luke 18:27; Rev 15:3) who "took six days to make our world when He could have spoken it into existence in one."⁵¹ On the other hand it is fortunate that claims of evolutionary philosophy as reflected in many areas of science, along with its claimed scientific character, have often been doubted and in more recent times eloquently challenged by scientific creationists⁵² and others,⁵³ as well as by Seventh-day Adventist scholars in the sciences.⁵⁴

The Doctrine of Man. The denial of the biblical teaching about

TERREROS: WHAT IS AN ADVENTIST?

the creation of humankind in favor of evolutionary theory carries serious implications for Adventist theology.

Emil Brunner recognizes—without rejecting evolution—that it is Darwin, not Copernicus, Galileo, or Newton, who really disturbs modern man about biblical claims, because of the impact evolution has upon biblical anthropology.⁵⁵ Brunner's evaluation is correct. If the Paradise story is dismissed as mythical and wrong, it is not difficult to accept animal ancestry as the true origin of humanity. But Adventists are convinced that the biblical account clearly indicates the bodies of Adam and Eve were the result of God's direct intervention and not the product of a long process of development from previously existing animals.⁵⁶

Literally, Genesis 2:7 declares that after God had formed the man from the dust of the ground He “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life,” and then man became a living being (Heb. *Nepeš hayyāh*).⁵⁷ Long periods of time could not have elapsed between the formation of the man from the dust of the ground and the breathing of the breath of life into his nostrils. The context indicates that the phrase “man became a living soul” (KJV) does not allow for a prehuman form of life for Adam's body.⁵⁸ In other words, the fact that man became a “living being/creature” is a strong indication that Adam was not a living being until he became one by the creative breath of God.⁵⁹

For Adventists the words of Christ in regard to the creation of Adam and Eve are of crucial importance. He acknowledges the Genesis account as trustworthy by citing it to describing God's original purpose for the human race. “At the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female’” (Matt 19:4). If the special creation of humans is denied and an evolutionary development is accepted, we implicate Jesus as a false witness, hence, a liar. However, the testimony of the Creator and Savior is trustworthy and confirms the truth that there is something special about the creation of humankind.⁶⁰

Furthermore, the denial of the historical validity of the account

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

of the creation of humans and of their Fall runs counter to the biblical teaching about humanity's moral responsibility (Gen 2:15-17) and accountability (Gen 3:8-13). The evolutionary belief denies that mankind morally fell historically. Rather, Adam emerged already in a "fallen" state from his prehuman ancestors. The attempts to combine these diverse views on the origin of humankind (which includes death before the Fall) shifts the responsibility for human sin to the Creator. This is a significant implication for Christian theology as well as for Adventist belief.⁶¹

Eschatology. Eschatology is very important for Adventists. They are a future oriented people. They are a people of hope. If the evolutionary explanation for the origin and development of humans with its constant striving for survival is accepted, what consequences are there for biblical eschatology and for our hope for eternal life? Could we have any assurance of a new earth where pain, struggle for existence, and death will be absent?⁶²

Eschatology is central to the great controversy between God and Satan. Because Satan has succeeded in convincing most of the inhabitants of this world that evolution is a fact, their hope for the beginning of a new world order is based on expectations other than the second advent of Christ. On the other hand, Adventists are ever willing to present God as the Creator (Rev 14:6-7) and to exalt Him as the Renewer of this planet's deplorable condition. In so doing, Adventists point to Christ's second advent as the concluding, turning point in the history of the earth.

Seventh-day Adventists base their hope in the Bible and perceive the future resurrection of believers as almost a "replay" of the scenario of the creation of Adam.⁶³ By contrast, Bernard Ramm notes that according to science there is no hope for the world on the horizon. Rather, the perspective is that soon life will not be possible for humanity on this earth, because "the enormous destructive factors in our current situation make any hope for progress bleak."⁶⁴ As if following Ramm's train of thought on the issue, Jewett remarks

TERREROS: WHAT IS AN ADVENTIST?

insightfully that, were the Christians to make the theological affirmation of creation rest on natural sciences, consistency would compel them to embrace a scientific view of the end of the world as well. This view would amount to an eschatology dismal beyond imagination and shrouded in nihilistic darkness.⁶⁵

Conversely, even though God reserves the right to terminate what He has made, genuine hope is found in the Bible's teaching on the literal return of the Lord and Creator subsequent to which He will bring about a new creation by "making everything new!" (Rev 21:5; cf. Isa 65:17).

Proclaiming God As Creator

Seventh-day Adventists are citizens of the world who are conscious of their high origin, created in God's own image and likeness (Gen 1:27). As such, we recognize we are managers of the good things God has created. We are mindful of being but co-workers with other fellow human beings. Even though God commanded humankind to rule "over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (Gen 1:28), they were not commanded to lord it over their fellow humans. Forgetfulness of this principle has brought about oppression and unhappiness throughout human history. Pharaoh, for instance, oppressed the Israelites because, among other things, he wished to ignore that the earth, and everything on it, is the Lord's (Exod 9:29).

Conscious of our mission as God's stewards, we Adventists proclaim to the world that the God of the Scriptures is the Originator and the Sustainer of His creation. We do this by example and by proclamation:

By Example. Because the creation is God's, as Adventists we may proclaim His glory (Isa 43:7, 20-21) by exercising care over the natural world which surrounds us by:

- a. thoughtful and diligent cultivation of the ground (Prov 28:19).
- b. taking proper care of such natural elements in the ecosystem

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

as water, the air, the soil, etc. because the land is the Lord's (Ps 24:1).

c. selecting, preparing, and sowing only the best seeds possible (Matt 13:24).

d. learning and applying the best and most adequate farming methods (planting, pruning, grafting, etc.).

e. giving thought how to best restore and revitalize the land to obtain the best yield possible (cf. Lev 25:3-7).

f. taking proper measures in the disposal of waste materials and in the use of chemical products to avoid adding to the contamination of the planet.

g. Taking proper care of pets and animals (Prov 12:10).

h. Caring and exercising justice with employees, subordinates, and fellow workers, who also reflect the image of God. Malachi the prophet asks: "Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another?" (Mal 2:10).

In Adventist understanding of the Bible, the state of the created order—which includes the nonhuman creation—is consistently linked with human activity and responsibility so that, as Sally Alsford has said, "the history of sin and salvation is the history of the created order as a whole, not only the history of humanity."⁶⁶ Alsford calls this the concept of "relationality."⁶⁷

While Adventist Christians should exercise care over the created order of things, that is, the natural world, we would avoid worshiping and serving the creation rather than the Creator—the only One to be forever praised (Rom 1:25).

By Proclamation. Seventh-day Adventists are world citizens who not only live by their own convictions, but also have a message to proclaim to others. The core of that message is the eternal gospel. We are convinced that we are an integral part of that special group of people the Bible calls the Remnant, called by God to make a swift and powerful final proclamation of the good news symbolized by three angels flying in midair proclaiming the eternal gospel to those who live

TERREROS: WHAT IS AN ADVENTIST?

on the earth at the endtime (Rev 14:6-12).

The eschatological importance of this proclamation, in the context of the great controversy, can perhaps be better perceived by noting some contrasting elements between the message of the three angels and the teachings of evolution.

First, while the Bible defines the gospel as eternal and matter as non-eternal (by saying it had a beginning), the evolutionary worldview considers matter as eternal and ascribes a beginning to the gospel by indicating that it was created by a given community within a process marked by a historical development of the biblical text.⁶⁸

Second, while the intent of the three angels' message is to guide the world to worship God as the Creator and to give Him glory (Rev 14:7), evolution has succeeded in guiding the world to deny Him His role and authority as Creator (Rom 1:21, 25).

Third, no Adventist would doubt that the teachings of evolutionary theory now form part of Babylon's maddening wine with which the world is drunk. The contrasting point (as far as the content of the messages is concerned) is that while, on the one hand, the three angels' gospel is being proclaimed "to every nation, tribe, language and people" (Rev 14:6), Babylon is making "all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries" (Rev 14:8).

Fourth, the timing. Precisely by the time the three angels' were to be given to the world, around 1844, evolution's *opum magnum*, Darwin's *Origins*, was under preparation to be given to that same world as the single most influential book in making evolution credible. And, exactly in 1844, Robert Chambers published anonymously in North-America his landmark work, *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, as influential then as few other books in promoting theistic evolution.

If this is the biblical and historical situation, Adventists cannot afford to be neutral, we have to take sides. It is not possible to be passive on the issue. We must be active in proclaiming God as the Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer of the world.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

In connection with this, it needs to be said that Adventists have a message of hope to give to the world. Ours is a tridimensional hope. First, in the past, as believers, we have been already saved in that hope (Rom 8:24a). Second, such hope bolsters us to face pain and suffering in the present (Rom 8:18). And third, it causes us as people of God, along with the whole creation, to wait in eager expectation for the glory to be revealed in the future (Rom 8:19, 22).

Belief in God as Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer is not an exclusive but a very “inclusive” message to be cherished and shared. It embraces the whole of creation. If creation provides less than a perfect world and is subject to frustration, it is “not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope” (see Rom 8:20). Therefore, by faith in God’s promises and faithfulness, we as Adventists look forward to the time when “the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God” (Rom 8:21). This is so, for, as theistic evolutionist George L. Murphy recognizes, “cosmic redemption does mean that all created natures, and not only the human, will share in the new creation.”⁶⁹

Summary and Conclusion

The greatest counterweight Adventists have to face in upholding biblical creation are the teachings of evolutionary theory. The influence of such teachings in today’s world is so pervasive that it seems as if Protagoras’ ancient dictum that “man is the measure of all things,” so positive in a world sunken in humanism, has now given way to a more modern one, “evolution is the measure of all things.”⁷⁰

Though citizens of this same world, Adventists are believers who live by an entirely different conviction: God himself, as revealed primarily in Christ, in Scriptures and in nature, is the measure of all things, for “in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them,” and He “lives for ever and ever” (Exod 20:11; Rev 4:10).

TERREROS: WHAT IS AN ADVENTIST?

In harmony with this conviction, Adventists uphold as non-negotiable such creation-related beliefs as the reliability of the Scriptures, the creatorship of Jesus Christ, the present validity of Sabbath worship, and the second advent of our Lord and Savior. We accept a recent, literal and *ex nihilo* creation and grasp the theological implication that the denial of the Bible's testimony on such a creation has an adverse impact upon the character of God, the doctrines of man, redemption, and biblical eschatology, as well as other biblical teachings.

Both by example and proclamation Adventists believe we are to declare to the world that God is the Creator of all things, and we hope in the final consummation of the plan of salvation to join the celestial choir that will sing, "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being" (Rev 4:11).

Endnotes

1 *Seventh-day Adventist Believe. . . : A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1988), p. 165.

2 All Scripture citations in this essay are from the New International Version.

3 Richard Rice, *The Reign of God: An Introduction to Christian Theology from a Seventh-day Adventist Perspective* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1985), p. 370.

4 Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1958), p. 336.

5 *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, p. 227.

6 White, *Spiritual Gifts* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1945), vol. 3, p. 93.

7 White, *Steps to Christ* (Phoenix, AZ: Inspiration Books, 19778), p. 73.

8 *Ibid.*; *Spiritual Gifts*, 3:90-96.

9 Marvin L. Lubenow, "Does a Proper Interpretation of Scripture Require a Recent Creation?" in *Decade of Creation*, ed. Henry M. Morris and Donald H. Rohrer (San Diego, CA: Creation-Life Publishers, 1981), pp. 90-104. See also,

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Clyde L. Webster, Jr., "Genesis and Time: What Radiometric Dating Tells Us," *Dialogue*, vol. 8, no. 2 [1993], pp. 5-8.

10 Henry M. Morris, scientific creationism's main leader, observes that "Adventists to some degree have remained solidly creationist because their main teacher/founder, Ellen G. White, taught literal creationism." Henry M. Morris, *History of Modern Creationism* (Santee, CA: Institute for Creation Research, 2d ed. 1993), p. 92

11 A statement made by E. G. White might have some application at this juncture. She wrote that "like the stars in the vast circuit of their appointed path, God's purposes know no haste and no delay." White, *The Desire of Ages* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, paperback ed., 1970), p. 29.

12 Without ignoring the validity of science when checked by revelation, it is important, at this juncture, to keep in mind Langdon Gilkey's insightful observation as to what has been happening in recent history. It is his thesis that, "The most important change in the understanding of religious truth in the last centuries—a change that still dominates our thought today—has been caused more by the work of science than by any other factor, religious or cultural." Langdon Gilkey, *Religion and the Scientific Future: Reflections on Myth, Science, and Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 4. Gilkey's words imply that on the understanding of religious truth in modern history, science has had a greater influence than the Bible.

13 Clark Pinnock, "Climbing Out of a Swamp: the Evangelical Struggle to Understand the Creation Texts," *Interpretation* 43 (January 1989); p. 154.

14 The Gap Theory proposes, in summary, that millions of years elapsed between the events described in Gen 1:1 and those narrated in Gen 1:3, and that Creation took place in three stages: A pre-Adamic period when the earth was perfect and beautiful (Gen 1:1); an intermediate period in which it became empty and formless (Gen 1:2); and the "reconstitution" period described in Genesis 1:3ff.

15 See Richard M. Davidson, "In the Beginning: How to Interpret Genesis 1," *Dialogue* vol. 6, no. 3 [194], p. 11.

16 These include, in addition to the Gap Theory, the Geological Ages Theory which postulates that Creation days were not literal days but very long periods of time, the Abridged Genealogies Theory which claims that if biblical genealogies omit generations, as some do, such omissions could account for all the time necessary for evolution to occur, and the Artistic Theory, in which the Genesis record is viewed just as a literary and artistic account intended to convey religious truth but not scientific reality.

17 For a brief critique of this theory see Gerhard F. Hasel, "Los `Día_ de la Creación en Génesis 1: Son `Día_ Literales o `Período_ Figurados di Tiempo?"

TERREROS: WHAT IS AN ADVENTIST?

Ciencia de los Origenes 40-41 (Enero-Agosto 1995): p. 5.

18 White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 113.

19 Ibid., p. 111.

20 Geoffrey W. Bromiley, "Creator," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992 ed.), vol. 1, pp. 802-803.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Some authors see in theistic evolution an internal contradiction since evolution is naturalism and theism is supernaturalism. The two brought together in "theistic evolution" would then mean "supernatural naturalism." Randy L. Wysong, *The Creation-Evolution Controversy* (Lansing, MI: Inquiry Press, 1976), p. 63.

24 Benjamin Warfield, "Review of God's Image in Man," by James Orr, *The Princeton Theological Review* 4 (1906): p. 557.

25 Ibid. Warfield's judgment is as valid here as when he goes on to assert that "evolution can never, under any circumstances, issue in a product which is specifically new: 'modification' is the utmost that it can achieve,—'origination' is beyond its tether" (ibid). See also John N. Moore, "Was Evolution Involved in the Process of Creation? 'No,'" in Ronald Youngblood, ed. *The Genesis Debate: Persistent Questions About Creation and the Flood* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1990), p. 96.

26 See Charles C. Ryrie, "The Bible and Evolution," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124 (January-March 1967): p. 68 passim.

27 E. G. White affirms that matter does not possess vital power, "nor does it work anything through any inherent energy of its own," *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 14.

28 White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948), vol. 8, pp. 258-259.

29 Take for instance the origin of man, about which even Karl Barth observed that by "the idea of man as an animal endowed with reason, we are not led . . . to God." Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* iii/2 (London: T. & t. Clark, 1936), p. 77.

30 Richard Bube, "Biblical Evolutionism?" *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 23 (December 1971); p. 141.

31 Gordon Wilson, *Theistic Evolution* (Athens, AL: C. E. I. Publishing Co., 1972), p. 31.

32 Ibid., p. 33.

33 Fred Van Dyke, "Theological Problems in Theistic Evolution," *Journal*

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

of the American Scientific Affiliation 38 (March 1986), p. 313.

34 John Hedley Brooke, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 313.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

37 Karl Schmitz-Moormann, "Evolution and Redemption: What is the Meaning of Christians Proclaiming Salvation in an Evolutionary World?" *Progress in Theology Newsletter of the John Templeton Foundation's center for Humility Theology* 1 (June 1993): p. 7.

38 Ibid. See also Norman P. Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin: A Historical and Critical Study* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1927), p. 9-10.

39 David A. Young, *Creation and the Flood: An Alternative to Flood Geology and Theistic Evolution* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1977), p. 166; For more on this topic see Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, vol. 1; *God, Authority and Salvation* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978).

40 See, for instance, Calum M. Carmichael, "The Paradise Myth: Interpreting Without Jewish and Christian Spectacles," in Paul Morris and Deborah Sawyer, eds. *A Walk in the Garden: Biblical, Iconographical and Literary Images of Eden*, JSOT Series (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1992), pp. 47-63; John Polkinghorne, *Reason and Reality: The Relationship Between Science and Theology* (London: SPCK, 1991), p. 99.

41 Carmichael, p. 7.

42 Pinnock remarks that redemption history begins with the sin of humankind, and evangelical soteriology is dependant on a literal Fall of man (Pinnock, p. 151).

43 John Rendle-Short, *Man: Ape or Image: The Christian Dilemma*, 2d ed. (San Diego: Master Book Publishers, 1984), p. 152.

44 On the theological implications of affirming death as a reality in the world before the Fall of man, see Marco T. Terreros, "Death Before the Sin of Adam: A Fundamental Concept in Theistic Evolution and Its Implications for Evangelical Theology," Ph.D. Dissertation, Andrews University, 1994.

45 Waters, p. 150.

46 E. C. Lucas, "Some Scientific Issues Related to the Understanding of Genesis 1-3," *The-melios* 12 (January 1987): p. 50.

47 Edward John Carnell, *The Case for Orthodox Theology* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1959), p. 95.

48 For example, Conrad Hyers in *The Meaning of Creation: Genesis and*

TERREROS: WHAT IS AN ADVENTIST?

Modern Science (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1984), p. 86, states that “the weight of scientific evidence is too great, and scientific arguments too persuasive, for one to hold any longer to the literal six-day creationism.” And he goes on to show that not only he but Ramm, and “a number of other evangelical writers” have taken a similar approach to the Bible in an attempt to avoid the “fiat-only” literalism of the fundamentalists “and allow for the more established results of modern science” (*ibid.*, p. 87).

49 *Ibid.*, p. 85.

50 Paul K. Jewett, *God, Creation and Revelation: A Neo-Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 479-480.

51 White, Letter 7a, 1878, Ellen G. White Research Center, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

52 E.g., Henry M. Morris, ed., *Scientific Creationism*. See also, *Idem*, *Studies in the Bible and Science, or Christ and Creation* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1966); Henry M. Morris and Gary E. Parker, *What Is Creation Science?* (San Diego, CA: Master Book Publishers, 1982), Henry M. Morris, *The Biblical Basis for Modern Science*; For a listing of the more prominent creation scientists of the present generation, see John C. Whitcomb and D. B. DeYoung, *The Moon: Its Creation, Form, and Significance* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH, 1978), pp. 166-169.

53 See, for instance, Michael Denton, *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* (Bethesda, MD: Adler & Adler, 1986); E. J. Ambrose, *The Mirror of Creation*, vol. 11 of Theology and Science at the Frontiers of Knowledge Series (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1990); Wendell R. Bird, *The Origin of Species Revisited: The Theories of Evolution and of Abrupt Appearance*, 2 vols. (Nashville, TN: Regency, 1991); Phillip E. Johnson, *Darwin on Trial* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991); Richard Milton, *The Facts of Life: Shattering the Myth of Darwinism* (London: Fourth Estate, 1992). For additional sources, stemming from a broad variety of perspectives, see Tom McIver, *Anti-Evolution: A Reader's Guide to Writings Before and After Darwin* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, paperback ed., 1992).

54 See, for example, Robert H. Brown, “Radiometric Age and the Traditional Hebrew-Christian View of Time,” *Origins* 4 (1977): pp. 68-75; *Idem*, “Geo and Cosmic Chronology,” *Origins* 8 (1981): pp. 20-45; *Idem*, “How Solid Is a Radioisotope Age of a Rock?” *Origins* 10 (1983): pp. 93-95; Arthur V. Chadwick, “Precambrian Pollen in the Grand Canyon—A Reexamination,” *Origins* 8 (1981): pp. 7-12; Robert H. Brown and Harold G. Coffin, “Literature Reviews: Burgess Shale Reexamined,” *Origins* 17 (1990): pp. 33-37; Mart de Groot, “Cosmology and Genesis: The Road to Harmony and the Need for Cosmological

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Alternatives," *Origins* 19 (1992): pp. 8-32; George T. Javor, "A New Attempt to Understand the Origin of Life: The Theory of Surface-Metabolism" *Origins* 16 (1989): pp. 40-44; Ariel A. Roth, "Those Gaps in the Sedimentary Layers," *Origins* 15 (1988): pp. 75-92; Idem, "Life in the Deep Rocks and the Deep Fossil record," *Origins* 19 (1992): pp. 93-104; G. E. Snow and G. T. Javor, "Oxygen and Evolution," *Origins* 2 (1975): pp. 59-63; Clyde L. Webster, "The Implications of the Oklo Phenomenon on the Constancy of Radiometric Decay Rates," *Origins* 17 (1990): pp. 86-92; *Proceedings of the International Conferences on Creationism, 1986*, vol. 1, "Basic and Educational Sessions," vol. 2, "Technical Symposium Sessions and Additional Topics," ed. Robert E. Walsh (Pittsburg, PA: 362 Ashland Ave., 1986), and *Proceedings of the International Conferences on Creationism, 1990*, vol. 1, "General Sessions," vol. 2, "Technical Symposium Sessions and Additional topics," ed., Robert E. Walsh (Pittsburg, PA: 362 Ashland Ave., 1990); Harold Coffin, *Origin by Design* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1983); see also Leo R. Van Dolson, ed., *Our Real Roots: Scientific Support for Creationism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1979).

55 Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1952), p. 79.

56 John C. Whitcomb, Jr., *The Early Earth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1972), p. 103.

57 Nepeš hayyāh is better translated "living creature," or "living being" (as in the NIV).

58 Whitcomb, p. 105.

59 Ibid. Noting that, according to theistic evolution, the physical dimension of man, the pre-human form which God infused with a soul, must necessarily have been a living being, Erickson observes that "this tenet of theistic evolution contradicts the statement in Genesis 2:7 that man became a living being when God formed him and breathed into him the breath of life." Erickson, p. 483 (Erickson's emphasis).

60 Frances A. Schaeffer, *Genesis in Space and Time: The Flow of Biblical History* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1972), p. 33.

61 See Nigel M. de S. Cameron, *Evolution and the Authority of the Bible* (Greenwood, SC: Attic Press, 1983), pp. 46-71.

62 For example, Gertrude Himmelfarb points to William H. White, a Christian believer who could no longer have faith in an immortality that would "perpetuate through all eternity the countless millions of barbaric, half bestial forms that must have inhabited the earth before the final evolution of man. White gave up immortality." Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Darwin and the Darwinian*

TERREROS: WHAT IS AN ADVENTIST?

Revolution (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1959), p. 369.

63 Lubenow, p. 95

64 Bernard Ramm, *Offense to Reason: A Theology of Sin* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1985), p. 123.

65 Jewett, *God, Creation, and Revelation*, p. 477.

66 Sally E. Alsford, "Evil in the Non-Human World," *Science and Christian Belief* 3 (October 1991); p. 125. Alsford illustrates the point thus: "Just as a family will inevitably be affected by the actions of one member, because of the 'organic' nature of their inter-relatedness, so too creation is inevitably affected by our actions" (ibid.).

67 Alsford explains thus the state of the theological discussion based on relationality as a key to understanding creation-related issues: "It is not so much the possession of particular faculties or abilities which distinguishes us from the rest of creation, but it is the fact that it is an essential element of our humanity to be in relationship. Just as our triune Creator is eternally in relationship, within the being of God, so we too are seriously and unavoidably related to God, to our fellow human beings and also to our environment. These relationships may be broken or disrupted by sin, but they are still determinative of our being" (Ibid.). A similar argument, on the basis of the Noachic covenant, is advanced in James A. Nash, *Loving Nature: Ecological Integrity and Christian Responsibility* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), pp. 100-102.

68 As many serious Bible students probably know, this belief frames the basic thrust of the historical-critical method of the study of Scriptures.

69 George L. Murphy, "A Theological Argument for Evolution," *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 38 (March 1986), p. 21.

70 See Ramm, p. 172, n. 28.