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Creation and the Adventist Church (The Associate Editor's Desk)

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THE ASSOCIATE EDITORS' DESK



Gerhard Pfandl

Biblical writers often refer to phenomena of nature as a revelation of God's majesty and greatness. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork," says David in Psalm 19:1 (NKJV). How true! Consider the universe for a moment! On a clear night, one can see about 3,000 stars with the naked eye. Astronomers, however, tell us that our Milky Way galaxy has about two hundred thousand million stars, all in their appointed order circling along the orbit God assigned to them. Yet our galaxy is only one among several hundred thousand million galaxies in the universe that astronomers can locate with their strongest telescopes. And who knows how many more galaxies there are beyond that.

Distances in the universe boggle the mind: Apart from the Sun, the nearest star to our Earth, Alpha Centauri, is 5.22 trillion light-years away. (One light-year is the distance light travels in one year: about 5.9 trillion miles!) A spaceship traveling 100,000

CREATION AND THE ADVENTIST CHURCH

miles per hour would require about 29,000 years to get there. Just think of it: our Milky Way is said to have a diameter of 100,000 light years; yet compared to some of the other galaxies in the universe, it is not part of the big league! The largest galaxy known thus far is *Markarian*, with a diameter of 1.3 million light-years. And here we are on planet Earth, a mere grain of sand in the vast expanse of the universe whose limits, if there are any, are beyond our comprehension. Indeed, "What is man that You are mindful of him?" (Ps. 8:4, NKJV).

Similar awe-inspiring facts would come to light if we used an electron microscope to study the 20,000 to 25,000 genes each individual possesses, or the millions of cells in the visual cortex of the brain. The plant world provides us with some amazing statistics. How many of us realize that

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during the summer, full-grown trees may get as much as 40 gallons of water up to their branches and leaves every day—without electric pumps. The secret is that “when water evaporates from the leaves, it creates a constant compensating suction of water below. The suction continues through twigs, branches, and trunk down to the roots.”¹ Our finite minds are simply unable to comprehend all the wonders of the created world.

Yet, in spite of overwhelming evidence for design in nature, i.e., evidence for a creative mind or a Creator, most people, at least in the “sophisticated” Western world, believe that everything came into existence by chance over billions of years. Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution, ridiculed at first, has truly captured the mind of modern humankind. Atheists and agnostics see evolution as the only viable option to explain the origin of life, and individuals who still believe in a supernatural being are frequently so overwhelmed by the “evidence” of the scientific establishment that they opt for theistic evolution, i.e., God used evolution to create the world we live in.

For the first hundred years of our existence as an organized body, Seventh-day Adventists stood united in defense of a six-day creation of our world within the past six to ten thousand years. After all, every Sabbath we were reminded of the fourth commandment, which provides the rea-

son for keeping the Sabbath rather than Sunday. “In six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it” (Ex. 20:11, NKJV).

In recent decades, however, cracks have begun to appear in this united stand against evolution. Some scientists and theologians in our educational system have begun to raise question as to the wisdom of holding on to our belief in a six-day creation in the face of what they believe is overwhelming scientific evidence to the contrary. In 1980, therefore, at the General Conference in Dallas, where 27 Fundamentals Beliefs were officially accepted as the church’s statement of faith, the church for the first time in our history officially stated that we believe in a six-day creation. We had always believed it, but it was never formally accepted by a vote of the General Conference in session.

Fundamental Belief number six on Creation says, “God is Creator of all things, and has revealed in Scripture the authentic account of His creative activity. In six days the Lord made ‘the heaven and the earth’ and all living things upon the earth, and rested on the seventh day of that first week. Thus He established the Sabbath as a perpetual memorial of His completed creative work. The first man and woman were made in the

image of God as the crowning work of Creation, given dominion over the world, and charged with responsibility to care for it. When the world was finished it was ‘very good,’ declaring the glory of God.”² In this Fundamental Belief, it is clearly spelled out that we believe (a) that God created heaven and earth and all that is therein in six days, and (b) that the Sabbath is a continual reminder of the six-day creation.

Yet, this did not stop some scholars and scientists who see Creation extending over millions of years from advocating a modified form of theistic evolution. The General Conference, therefore, initiated a series of Faith and Science conferences from 2002 to 2004 in which the various issues surrounding the Creation/evolution controversy were openly discussed. The final report of the International Faith and Science Conference Organizing Committee in 2004 was submitted to the 2004 Autumn Council of the General Conference. It stated that though there is widespread affirmation of the church’s position on creation, “[W]e recognize that some among us interpret the biblical record in ways that lead to sharply different conclusions.”³

The 2004 Annual Council, after careful discussion, produced a response to the report in which the members strongly endorsed the church’s historic, biblical position of

belief in a literal, recent, six-day Creation. To close any possible loophole by which a day could mean something other than a 24-hour day, the council stated “that the seven days of the Creation account were literal 24-hour days forming a week identical in time to what we now experience as a week.”⁴ The response also called upon all boards and teachers at out schools to uphold and advocate the church’s position on origins.

The importance of belief in a six-day Creation cannot be emphasized enough. Once this article of faith is compromised, the Sabbath and the historicity of the first 11 chapters of Genesis stand on shaky ground. And if we cannot be sure that the Fall of humanity and the Flood are historical events, how can we know that the plan of salvation and the Second Advent are? Solomon wrote, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding” (Prov. 3:5, NKJV).” Wise counsel indeed!

REFERENCES

¹ George Vandeman et al, *God’s Wonderful World* (Grantham, England: Autumn House, 19912), p. 47.

² *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines*, (Washington, D.C: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1988), p. 68.

³ “An Affirmation of Creation,” Report of the International Faith and Science Conference Organizing Committee, p. 5.

⁴ “Response to an Affirmation of Creation,” Annual Council 2004, p. 1.