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The President’s Page: Creation—The Sine Qua Non of Adventism

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The doctrine of Creation is an article of faith on which the Seventh-day Adventist Church stands or falls. Creation is crucial for our theology because, I am deeply convinced, all our essential doctrinal points can be directly or indirectly traced to the Creation roots. Each of our 27 fundamental beliefs is somehow tied to Creation.

The Gospel according to Moses starts with an astounding cornerstone proclamation: God is the Creator (“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” [Gen 1:1]). This statement is not proven, but revealed to us as the truth, and all the rest of God’s revelation depends on this premise and critical recognition (Heb 11:3, 6). Biblical authors do not try to defend it, but boldly declare it. No photographs have been given or videos provided of Creation week, because primarily the Creator God is not to be argued about but witnessed. The Old Testament not only starts with the theme of Creation, but also ends with the same thought (in the Hebrew canon with the hope of restoration [2 Chr 36:22–23], or in the Christian canon with the view of the splendid Day of the Lord [Mal 4:1–6]) and is full of references to the Creator God (e.g., Gen 14:19–22; Deut 32:6; Pss 8; 19; 33:9; 104; 139; Isa 40:28; 41:20; 45:7–8; 46:9–10; 55:11; Jer 10:6–16; 51:15–19). This theme permeates all biblical material.

The whole Bible reveals its clear paradigm—from creation (Gen 1–2) through de-creation (the Fall [Gen 3] and the Flood accounts [Gen 6–7]) to re-creation (Gen 8–9; and fully in Rev 21–22). Between Creation and the ultimate new Creation lies and is explained the story of redemption, of how God deals with sin and how He saves those who believe in Him. Let us not forget that redemption and salvation are nothing more than a spiritual re-creation which culminates in the restoration of all things in Christ (Eph 1:10).

The New Testament presents the same picture as the Old Testament. It starts with genealogy and ends with the hope of the New Heavens and the New

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Earth. There are many references to God as the Creator (e.g., Matt 19:4; Mark 13:19; John 1:1–3; Acts 17:24–28; Rom 1:19–25; Col 1:16–17; Rev 4:11). Thus, there is a whole deliberate design in the biblical canon from Creation to the new Creation which can be called a “Creation paradigm” or “Creation-eschatological pattern.” Without protology (the biblical doctrine of first things; i.e., the Creation) there is no eschatology (the biblical doctrine of last things; i.e., the Second Coming of Christ, the judgment, and the New Earth).

Our church’s name is bound to Creation and conveys an important message. The term “Seventh-day” points to the culmination point of the first Creation story, the Sabbath, and the designation “Adventist” leads to expectations of the Second Advent of Jesus Christ (i.e., a re-creation where God will make everything new). Our understanding of Creation with all its connections and implications provides a unique contribution to the interpretation of Christian theology.

Creation is about life, and the essence of life is relationship. In the Creation accounts, God is presented as the One who cares for relationships. With the word “relationship,” I summarize both biblical accounts of Creation, because the purpose of the first Creation narrative (Gen 1:1–2:4a) is establishing a relationship between God and humans. The second Creation account (Gen 2:4b–25) is about building a relationship in the most nuclear, essential human cell—marriage. These two relationships, vertical and horizontal, are complementary and must always come in the described ordered sequence so that our life can be meaningful, beautiful, and happy. First comes a cultivation of a loving relationship with God, then with our marriage partner, and finally with other people. Only God can provide all the resources for our life so we can be a contribution and blessing to each other. We were created totally dependent on God; therefore only from Him can we receive all we need for building deep bonds of lasting relationships. Genuine life is about relationships, and the crux of both Creation stories is about relationship. From the very beginning of God’s revelation, God is presented as the living God and the God of relationships!

Thus, from the Garden of Eden until today, we have two precious God-given gifts, the Sabbath (the climax of the first Creation account) and marriage (the apex of the second Creation narrative). No wonder that today the enemy of our lives severely attacks and wants to destroy both these vital institutions that remind us of life before sin. God calls us to be vigilant and not only to remember our roots but also restore them to their original meaning and purpose. Without this past there is no meaningful present and glorious future!

The first verses of the Bible provide the first definition of true life. Life can happen only where the Spirit of God (Gen 1:2b) and the Word of God (Gen 1:3) come together and reign (in the first Creation account, the phrase “and God said” occurs ten times!). Spirit + Word = Life. This is correct not only for the creation of a physical life but also for the birth of a spiritual life. A person can be born again only when he or she is born from above—when this person opens himself or herself to the influence of the Holy Spirit (John 3:5–8; Rom 8:14;

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Titus 3:5) and believes in the Word of God (John 1:12–13; 1 Pet 1:23; James 1:18). The doctrine of regeneration has its root in the biblical Creation story.

God creates out of love because He is love. We were not present at Creation; it was done for us and without us. Humans are the crown of God's physical creation and made wonderfully as man and woman in the image of God. God created everything ready for them in order that they could enjoy a full life. The Garden of Eden was the best home for the first couple. Creation reflects God's desire to make us happy and smiling so that we can make others happy and give them a reason to smile, too. The most essential ingredients in a relationship are mutual love and trust. God graciously provided these components so we could meaningfully communicate with Him and with other human beings.

Our God has a great sense for beauty and esthetics. When He creates, He does it perfectly and in abundance. He is really extravagant. Do you know that there are between 25 and 30 thousand species of orchids or nearly 300 thousand species of only beetles? What about the variety of colors in a meadow, thousands upon thousands of different species of birds, fish, butterflies, animals? What about the more than 100 billion galaxies in our universe? We can only marvel and stand in awe before our magnificent, glorious, omniscient, wise, holy, gracious, and loving Creator! The more we know Him, the more we admire Him. The more we understand what He is doing, the more we want to become acquainted with Him and follow Him, because His Presence means everything to us.

Claus Westermann accurately observes that the biblical message about our Creator is always in the context of praises. One cannot understand God as our Creator without admiring and praising Him at the same time. This conjunction with the exaltation of God is vital—He is unique, alive, no one is like Him, He is above all, and only He can create life. This is why He is worthy of our praises and adoration (see, for example, Pss 8:1–9; 19:1–4; 104:1–3, 31–35; Isa 40:28; Jer 10:6–13; and Rev 4:11). Westermann argues that “the real goal” of the biblical Creation stories is “the praise of the Creator.”¹

God is the Creator. This is the first marvelous message of the Holy Scriptures, and on this inspired truth hangs everything else. To remove or diminish this basic irreplaceable part of the chain of God's revelation means to break in pieces all the rest. This is why we as Seventh-day Adventist Bible scholars and theologians stress so vigorously on the basis of exegetical, theological, and literary grounds that the Creation week of Gen 1–2 consists of seven literal, historical, consecutive, and contiguous twenty-four hour days. Therefore, ATS welcomes the document “An Affirmation of Creation” (The International Faith and Science Conference Organizing Committee's report) and the “Response to an Affirmation of Creation” (voted by the members of the General Conference Ex-

¹ *The Genesis Accounts of Creation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), 37.

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ecutive Committee at the 2004 Annual Council). This biblical teaching is the real bedrock and a very precious jewel of the infallible Word of God.

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