

## **Consequences of Moving Away from a Recent Six-Day Creation<sup>1</sup>**

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During the last two years we have heard many papers that challenge the traditional Adventist, biblically-founded position of a recent six-day creation. I believe there are many problems with the “objections” and the alternatives they offer. In this brief article I will outline three of the many consequences that I believe would result from rejection of a recent six-day creation: (1) hermeneutical inconsistency and poor exegesis (this can lead to a loss of understanding and authority of the Bible); (2) a diminishing importance of the Cross; (3) the loss of effective witnessing due to mutually exclusive messages.

### **Requires Hermeneutical Inconsistency and Poor Exegetical Practice**

Let’s begin with some basic definitions. In scholarly discussions, the principles and science of interpretation is called *hermeneutics*; and bringing out of the biblical text what is already there is referred to as *exegesis*. In contrast to exegesis, which is a sound hermeneutical practice, *eisegesis* refers to the practice of interpreters reading into the text what is not there.

Speaking as a so-called conservative in regards to our current discussions on creation, I have been particularly disappointed that none of those opposed to our longstanding position has been able to offer any sort of a systematic and consistent hermeneutic or theology. Rather, we are simply told that the traditional interpretations of Genesis are wrong—that the author of Genesis intended something else other than a literal historical understanding. This is my impression, anyway. But what is the justification for this non-literal interpretation?

A number of hermeneutical approaches to Scripture have been adopted by different groups of Christians through time. Of special interest are those schools of interpretation that have arisen since the advent of modern higher criticism

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on a paper presented at the 2004 Faith and Science Conference in Denver, Colorado, August 20-26, 2004.

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(i.e., the historical critical method) in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. We may classify these schools as<sup>2</sup>:

(i) the “Liberal” view—denies the full inspiration, authority, internal consistency, and trustworthiness of Scripture; because the Bible is believed to be a fallible human document, it cannot always be trusted; this view employs the methodology of higher-criticism to interpret Scripture;

(ii) the “Fundamentalist” view (some refer to it as the “Ultra-Conservative” view)—which upholds the full inspiration, authority, internal consistency, and infallibility of Scripture, *and a mechanical dictation or word-for-word mode of inspiration*; this view tends to employ the “proof-text” *method* of interpretation, using an isolated text arbitrarily to prove one’s own point;

(iii) the Evangelical “Orthodox” view (also known as the Conservative view)—this view holds that the Bible *is* the inspired and authoritative Word of God, fully inspired, internally coherent, and trustworthy or dependable in whatever it teaches or touches upon; this view rejects the mechanical dictation view of inspiration (unless the text indicates so), and employs the plain reading method of interpretation (known technically as the *grammatical-historical method*);

(iv) the “Neo-Orthodox” view (sometimes referred to as the Barthian view, after Swiss theologian Karl Barth)—which holds that the Bible is not the Word of God; it only *contains* the Word of God or *becomes* the Word of God to individuals when it grips their hearts; it also employs higher-criticism to interpret Scripture;

(v) the “Neo-Evangelical” or “Neo-Reformed” view (some call it the “Moderate Liberal” view)—which, while claiming to believe in the inspiration and authority of the Bible on issues of salvation, is nonetheless skeptical about the Bible’s full inspiration, authority, authenticity and reliability on historical and scientific issues; this view employs *modified* aspects of higher criticism to interpret Scripture.

As far as I know, few Adventists have advocated anything like the liberal, fundamentalist, or neo-orthodox views, at least as defined above. However, the *Evangelical-Orthodox (Conservative)* view and the *Neo-Reformed or Neo-Evangelical* view are especially relevant to our own current discussions. The two systems of interpretation seem to be competing in the Seventh-day Adventist church.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For the classifications used in this area, I have conflated the descriptions given by Norman L. Geisler, *Decide for Yourself: How History Views the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982) and Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, *Receiving the Word* (Berrien Springs: Berean, 1996) and his *Must We Be Silent* (Ann Arbor: Berean, 2001), 445-546.

<sup>3</sup> Koranteng-Pipim refers to these competing systems of interpretation in the SDA church as the Bible-believing (conservative) position and the Bible-doubting (or moderate liberalism) position. See his *Must We Be Silent*, 445-453.

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Historically, the *Evangelical-Orthodox* or (*conservative*) view arose in part as a response to the historical-critical approach to Scripture. Its leading advocates were Archibald Hodge and Benjamin Warfield.<sup>4</sup> The Orthodox view of the Scripture sees the Bible as not only containing the words of God, but being the Word of God; it acknowledges that Scripture is conveyed through humans but is infallible; the Bible is self-consistent and is historically and scientifically true. The Orthodox view holds to plenary and verbal inspiration (when the text so indicates—there are direct quotes from God), but denies that it was mechanically dictated. The orthodox view also teaches that Biblical Criticism (the historical-critical method) should not be allowed to contradict what Scripture says about itself.

The *Neo-evangelical* or *Neo-reformed* (or *moderate liberal*) view is more recent. Its leading advocates have been Gerrit Cornelius Berkouwer (1908-1996) and Jack B. Rogers—the latter represents a more recent and extreme form of this view. The Neo-Reformed view holds that the Bible is *both* Word of God and word of man—they emphasize the truly human aspect of Scripture and note that humans err. They believe in Divine sovereignty, but argue that the Bible is subject to human limitations. They believe the Bible *contains* the word of God, but does not equal the Word of God. The Bible is not an infallible divine word, but rather, reliable human words—especially about salvation. The Bible is a *witness* to divine revelation, but is not itself revelation. Concerning historical and scientific matters, the Bible is errant; it contains myths; its purpose is salvation not science. Neo-Reformed scholars protect the central saving message of Christ; however, this message is better known subjectively and experientially. Historical Criticism is a legitimate approach to Scripture.

From a scholarly perspective, the biggest problem with the Neo-reformed view is its lack of hermeneutical and exegetical consistency; this is especially evident in how Genesis 1-11 is treated.

Traditionally and officially, the Adventist church has endorsed the conservative *grammatical-historical* approach to the text, including Genesis 1-11.<sup>5</sup> Accommodating a non-literal view of these chapters (which is necessary for a theistic evolutionary approach or other alternate approaches that deny a recent 6-day creation) requires *rejection* of the grammatical-historical approach and a literal interpretation of these chapters.

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<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that while Warfield generally advocated a high view of Scripture, he backed off from this position with regards to Genesis 1-11; he was willing to accept a form of evolution. See B. B. Warfield, *Evolution, Science and Scripture*, ed. Mark A. Noll and David N. Livingstone (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000). His colleague, Hodges, was less inclined to accept evolution.

<sup>5</sup> At the 1986 Annual Council meeting in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, church leaders representing all the world fields of the Seventh-day Adventist church approved the report of the General Conference's "Methods of Bible Study Committee" as representative of the church's hermeneutical position. "The Methods of Bible Study" document was published in the *Adventist Review*, January 22, 1977, 18-20. Cf. Richard M. Davidson, "Biblical Interpretation," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2000), 58-104.

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Ironically, a non-literal interpretation flies in the face of sound exegetical practice among *both liberal and conservative* scholarship. It requires ignoring internal textual indicators that Genesis 1-11 was intended to be treated and understood like later materials in biblical books such as Chronicles and Kings that have traditionally been understood as “historical” books by virtually all scholars except the “minimalists.”

The understandings of modern science should not be used to “force” the text to say something contrary to what the ancient author thought or intended—to read an unintended meaning into the text is *eisegesis*, NOT *exegesis* and represents poor scholarship.

**Genesis 1-11: Literal or Non-Literal?**

The controversy about how to properly interpret Genesis 1-11 is not unique to Adventists, as illustrated by a recent exchange by two well-known Christian philosophers from Notre Dame, Ernan McMullin and Alvin Plantinga.<sup>6</sup>

McMullin took issue with Christians who read Genesis 1-11 literally by claiming, “the great majority of contemporary Scripture scholars agree [that to interpret early Genesis] literally or quasi-literally is to misunderstand the point that the writers of those narratives were trying to make.”

We have heard similar claims by some Adventist scholars in our current forum. However, Plantinga directly challenged McMullin’s claim that most Scripture scholars believe that Genesis was not intended to be understood literally.

First, of course, there are whole coveys of phalanxes of conservative critics—e.g. E. J. Young and G. C. Aalders—who think that the writers(s) of Genesis meant to teach much more than that creation depends upon the Lord (There was of course, Thomas Aquinas, who took early Genesis to teach that God created the world in six 24 hour days.) But the same goes for their more liberal colleagues.<sup>7</sup>

Plantinga then quotes three *liberal* representatives from different periods of Old Testament scholarship—Julius Wellhausen, Herman Gunkel, and James Barr—who all believe that Genesis 1-11 is to be understood literally. According to Wellhausen:

“[The author of Genesis] undoubtedly wants to depict faithfully the factual course of events in the coming-to-be of the world, he wants to give a cosmogonic theory. Anyone who denied that is confusing the value of the story for us with the intention of the author.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See the essay by Plantinga in *Intelligent Design, Creationism and Its Critics: Philosophical, Theological and Scientific Perspectives*, ed. Robert T. Pennock (Cambridge: Bradford, MIT P, 2001), 197-235).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

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Then Plantinga cites Herman Gunkel:

“People should never have denied that Genesis 1 wants to recount how the coming-to-be of the world actually happened”<sup>9</sup>

Finally, Plantinga cites James Barr:

“To take a well known instance, most conservative evangelical opinion today does *not* pursue a literal interpretation of the creation story in Genesis. A literal interpretation would hold that the world was created in six days, these day being the first of the series which we still experience as days and nights . . . so far as I know, there is no professor of Hebrew or Old Testament at any world-class university who does not believe that the *writer(s)* of Genesis 1–11 *intended* to convey to their readers the ideas that:

- (1) creation took place in a series of six days which were the same as the days of 24 hours we now experience
- (2) the figures contained in the Genesis genealogies provided by simple addition a chronology from the beginning of the world up to later stages in the biblical story
- (3) Noah’s flood was understood to be world-wide and extinguish all human and animal life except for those in the ark.”<sup>10</sup>

Plantinga reminds us that Barr’s statements are within a context in which

. . . he [Barr] means to discredit the ‘fundamentalists’ or ‘evangelicals’ by showing that they profess to take Scripture at its literal word, but in this case clearly do not do so, since it is obvious (at any rate to those professors at world class universities) that the writer(s) of Genesis meant to assert the three things Barr mentions.

For Barr, evangelicals who try to read Genesis in a non-literal fashion in order to conform to the claims of science are both inconsistent and demonstrating poor Biblical scholarship. Barr argues that there is no doubt that the author of Genesis *intended* to describe things in a historical-literal way, but he [Barr] doesn’t believe it because of modern science. For Barr, this is the more honest and scholarly approach.

Why the Difference of Opinion? Here I can only speculate, but I suspect that the philosophers like Mullen are more driven by the findings of science than the exegetical demands of the text. Here I would point out an observation that I have noted recently—while it is not 100%, I have noticed that those theological scholars who feel more free to re-interpret Genesis in a non-literal fashion are *not* usually trained as Hebrew, Old Testament, or Ancient Near Eastern scholars—rather, they tend to be trained in some area of religion or theology—systematics or philosophy, etc.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 217

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I have also noticed that the *non-literal* scholars tend to come from more conservative, evangelical schools or backgrounds, but have moved to the more “liberal” end of the spectrum within those contexts—they have a respect for Scripture, but are powerfully impressed by the scientific method and the findings of modern science. These Evangelicals, with their desire to preserve an inspired Bible, are more willing to help the Bible out of its “difficulty” of apparent ignorance concerning creation (and other “scientific facts”) by ascribing different intents and understandings—non-literal—that they believe the author of Genesis must have had in mind while composing his work. Ironically, *secular* liberals are at least more faithful to the text—they will acknowledge that the writer intended to be taken literally, but according to modern science, he was simply wrong.

**The Need for Consistency**

However, for the scholars with the Neo-Evangelical methodology to be *consistent*, they must also deny an historic Patriarchal period (Abraham), the Sojourn (Israel in Egypt), the Exodus (Red Sea), Mt. Sinai (Ten Commandments—Sabbath), the Conquest (Jericho), and probably the existence of the Monarchy (Solomon and David)—even the resurrection of Christ could be denied. It would appear that some neo-evangelicals are willing to move part way down this road, although there is a general resistance to playing with the “Christ event.”

True liberal historical critics have already seen this. This is nicely illustrated by Max Miller, a practicing historical critic—he knows what the Bible says and does not deny that this is what the ancients may have believed, but because of modern science (including scientific history), he, as a scholar, must reject it. As he points out:

Remember that *the Bible presupposes* a dynamic natural world into which God, from time to time, intrudes upon human affairs. It is a world with waters rolling back, burning bushes, and ax heads floating. God directs the course of history by simultaneously instructing Moses, regulating Pharaoh’s heart, and bringing unnatural disasters upon Egypt. God hands down laws on Mt. Sinai, and sends angels to defend Jerusalem against Sennacherib’s massive army.

*Modern* historians perceive the world to be more *orderly*, on the other hand; and another of the standard tenets of modern historiography is that *any* natural or historical phenomenon can be explained *without* reference to overt divine involvement. . . . we modern historians bring [biblical narratives] into line with the world as we perceive it. We leave out miracles, for example . . .<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See Max Miller in *What Has Archaeology to Do with Faith?* ed. James H. Charlesworth and Walter P. Weaver (Philadelphia: Trinity, 1992), 60-74; emphasis added.

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If we are going to start inserting non-literal meanings into the biblical text every time the text conflicts with the findings of modern science or historiography, then we must be consistent in the application from a hermeneutical perspective. This raises the question of how much are we willing to give up for consistency?

Surrendering the historicity of the text means that *theological conclusions* which are based on an assumption of historicity must also be given up. I remind my students that Adventist theology and all of the doctrines of which it consists were formulated with an assumption that the Biblical texts presented actual historical situations in which God spoke and interacted with humankind—the giving of the ten commandments, including the Sabbath and the sanctuary at Mt. Sinai, etc.

A movement to a neo-evangelical hermeneutic could result in Adventists abandoning the ten commandments (Sabbath), the sanctuary (there was no Mt Sinai experience), the non-immortality of the soul, the resurrection (ideas that did not exist in OT times); in terms of the NT we must abandon the second coming, and especially significant is denial of a literal blood atonement on the cross! There have been attempts to preserve the historicity of later Biblical events (like the Cross) by certain Christian (usually evangelical) scholars, but by accommodating evolution by denying the historicity of Genesis 1-11, they are forced into *methodological and hermeneutical inconsistencies* that preclude them from being taken seriously by either “mainstream” scholarship or “true” conservatives.

Tried and true exegetical tools must be employed. The words must be examined in their original language, lexicons consulted, syntax studied, context explored (including extra-biblical contexts), other relevant passages in Scripture examined, etc. Certainly, the genre must be determined, but this must be determined both by internal indicators in the text and by external literary parallels when available.

Those Adventist scholars who employed these methods (appropriate to the field) came to conclusions on Genesis 1-11 that are in harmony with the consensus found among leading scholars in both liberal and conservative biblical scholarship outside of Adventism. The only difference is that the Adventist scholars *believe* the Biblical text—the liberal scholars do not—but they do agree on what the text says and means! The author of Genesis *intended* to depict in a literal way the timing and manner in which the earth became inhabitable and occupied by all known living forms (formed and filled).

#### **Impact on the Cross and Human Salvation**

Besides the problem of a lack of exegetical rigor and consistency, interpretative approaches that deny the historicity of a recent six-day creation pose serious problems for the doctrine of salvation (what scholars refer to as *soteriological* problems).

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Simply put, a denial of the historic creation week also necessarily denies the creation on day six of that week of the *first historic humans* who were responsible for introducing sin into the human race; this in turn denies the spread of sin from that first human couple, the introduction of death into the world, and the need for the cross—at least how these things have been traditionally explained by mainstream Christianity for centuries.

Historically, Christians have traced their sinful condition and need for Jesus to the event known as the Fall (Gen 3). Christians believe that somehow, the results of the rebellion of Adam and Eve against God were passed on to all of their biological descendents—as Paul says in Romans 3:23, we all need Jesus, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” The church father Augustine attempted to explain the phenomena of how all of Adam and Eve’s descendents became sinners in his doctrine of Original Sin. This teaching has led to a considerable amount of theological discussion and controversy which is our well beyond our present discussion.

In brief, however, there were two central components to Augustine’s teaching: (1) that all human kind inherit Adam’s actual guilt for his rebellion; (2) that humans inherit from Adam a tendency to continue sinning—as Ellen White puts it—a *propensity* to sin is the common lot of all humans.

While Adventists have *not* subscribed to Augustine’s idea that we inherit and are condemned for Adam’s personal *guilt* that derived from his own act of rebellion, we *have* maintained that we do inherit a sinful *nature* with a propensity to sin that is so irresistible that we will inevitably commit our own sinful acts. Because of this inherited sinful nature, we need Christ’s death on the cross to forgive us our own sinfulness, and the grace of His Spirit to overcome our natural sinful tendencies.<sup>12</sup>

Theistic evolution, on the other hand, has no place for an historic Adam and Eve nor an historic fall. To fully appreciate this, it is important to understand how most physical anthropologists explain the origin of humans.<sup>13</sup> In brief, they do *not* believe that a single pair of human beings evolved into existence.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> John Fowler has provided a concise summary of the Adventist position by stating that “Adventists do not stress the idea of original sin in the sense that ‘personal, individual moral guilt adheres to Adam’s descendants because of his [Adam’s] sin. They stress, instead, that his sin resulted in the condition of estrangement from God in which every human being is born. This estrangement involves an inherent tendency to commit sin.” John Fowler, “Sin” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 265.

<sup>13</sup> See also James Gibson’s remarks in his paper “Issues In ‘Intermediate’ Models of Origins,” presented at the 2004 Faith and Science conference in Denver.

<sup>14</sup> A typical explanation, taken from a textbook on human evolution, is thus: “Speciation, or the development of a new species, does not happen suddenly, nor is it the result of one or two mutations in the history of a single family.” . . . “Speciation may occur if populations become so separated from each other geographically that gene exchanges are no longer possible. In adapting to their separate environments, the two populations may undergo enough genetic changes to prevent them from interbreeding.”

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Rather, it was an *entire population* of hominids that somehow became isolated from a “parent” population and due to a variety of factors, evolved into a new species that they define as the “first” modern humans.

Most theologians immediately recognize the implications of this view of human origins. The most liberal scholars have candidly admitted that the traditional doctrine of human salvation is no longer valid and must be done away with. For example, theologian John Hick has noted, “Until comparatively recent times the ancient myth of the origin of evil in the fall of man was quite reasonably assumed to be history.”<sup>15</sup> This view, says Hick, is

open to insuperable scientific . . . objections . . . We know today that the conditions that were to cause human . . . mortality [death] . . . were already part of the natural order prior to the emergence of man and prior therefore to any first human sin.<sup>16</sup>

In a similar vane, Catholic theologian Hans Kung, quotes with favor his fellow Catholic theistic evolutionist, Karl Schmitz-Moormann as follows:

The notion of [the] traditional view of redemption as reconciliation and ransom from the consequences of Adam’s fall is *nonsense* for anyone who knows about the evolutionary background to human existence in the modern world. Karl Schmitz-Moormann tells us what the new meaning of redemption must be: Salvation “cannot mean returning to an original state, but must be conceived as perfecting through the process of evolution.”<sup>17</sup>

This conclusion has led various theologians to propose a number of different solutions for the various soteriological problems that are immediately evident if one accepts a long-age, evolutionary approach to human origins. Some solutions involve the fall of an entire population, some have redefined “fall,” and still others suggested that God picked two of these new, modern hominids and infused them with a “soul,” making them truly human, after which these two chose to rebel against God. There are still other explanations that have emerged, but all of them reside in a realm of speculation outside of the Biblical text, require rather creative “exegesis,” and pose as many theological problems as they solve.

The only common thread among them is that they agree that the biblical depiction of the fall cannot be understood in the simple manner in which the text reads.

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<sup>15</sup> John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (London: Macmillan, 1966), 283.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, 285.

<sup>17</sup> Hans Kung, *Credo* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 22. See also Karl Schmitz-Moorman, “Evolution and Redemption: What Is the Meaning of Christian Proclaiming Salvation in an Evolving World?” in *Progress in Theology* 1/2 (June 1993): 7.

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Directly related to the teachings of human fall and salvation is the belief that from Adam and Eve's historic act of rebellion *death* was first introduced into the planet. Romans 5:12 says, "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, so death spread to all men because all sinned . . ."

The understanding that evolutionary geology and paleontology contradicts the Biblical teaching of the Fall's impact on both the human *and* sub-human creation has long been acknowledged. As early as 1840 Dr. Edward Hitchcock—a theologian and geologist (and President of Amherst College in Massachusetts, and that state's first official geologist)—clearly saw the implications of the new science of geology on the doctrine of the Fall and its impact on nature. He wrote:

The general interpretation of the Bible has been, that until the Fall of man, death did not exist in the world even among the inferior animals. For the bible asserts that by man came death (1 Cor 15:21) and by one man sin entered into the world and death by sin (Rom 5:12). But geology teaches us that myriads of animals lived and died before the creation of man.<sup>18</sup>

While some might argue that the death talked about in Romans 5 is only human death—not sub-human death—passages such as Roman 8 which talk about the *entire creation (ktsis)* being subjected to futility and hoping that it will be set free from its slavery to corruption indicate that the corruption of death penetrated all created life forms. That things changed in the animal kingdom in particular after the Fall is supported by references to a pre-Fall vegetarian diet for the animals and to their post-Fall participation in the blood-letting acts of violence (*hamas*) that resulted in the judgment of the Flood and the institution of capital punishment for animals that kill humans that was imposed on the animal kingdom immediately after the Flood. That the deadly predator-prey relationship that existed in the animal kingdom *after* the Fall was *not* seen as an ideal is clearly expressed in such eschatological passages as Isaiah 11.<sup>19</sup>

In summary, a denial of a recent creation six-day creation week requires the abandonment of the creation of a historic pair of ancestral humans—Adam and Eve—their literal Fall, the entrance of sin and death into the world, and the need of Christ's atoning death on the cross. Historically, Adventists have found the Bible's own view of how salvation works, including the origin of sin through the Fall, its spread to all humanity and nature, and its eradication by Jesus on the cross, as the most complete, convincing, and satisfying explanation.

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<sup>18</sup> Edward Hitchcock reference is from *Elementary Geology* (New York: Ivison and Phinney, 1840), 273.

<sup>19</sup> So-called problem passages that seem to describe death in the Edenic or New Earth were dealt with in my paper given at this conference, last year.

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### **The Loss of Effective Witnessing**

Finally, I believe that the endorsement of both a recent six-day creation and long age perspectives will seriously impede the Church's witness. I don't question that both recent creationists and, say, theistic evolutionists can win people to their viewpoint. This has been demonstrated many times. The real question is whether the church can survive diametrically opposed and mutually exclusive positions. I don't believe so. We must be honest and admit that the differences are not minor.

I will restrict my comments on this last section to a personal experience. I had an occasion to witness to two non-Adventist scientists about our Church's position on creation. They had been trained in traditional evolutionary thought, but seemed to show a genuine interest in Adventism and were curious about how Adventists dealt with evolution. I gave a careful, but honest reply explaining that we believed in a recent six-day creation, and how we attempted to understand the consensus scientific position in light of this biblical position. The scientists did not make fun of my argument—indeed they seemed to consider them thoughtfully. Later, within earshot, they followed up this conversation by asking more questions of another Adventist. This Adventist, however, was of a more “progressive” orientation, and dismissed the claim that Adventists held to a recent six-day creation by asserting that only backwards and uninformed Adventists would hold such a position. The scientists who had expressed interest to me about Adventism quit asking questions and showed no further interest in Adventism. One cannot help but think of Lincoln's words (paraphrasing Matthew 12:25)—“a house divided against itself cannot stand.” Or, “can two walk together unless they be agreed (Amos 3:3)?

I recognize that this personal experience may be dismissed as simply a pragmatic reason and not theological, but it seems to me that the best environment for successful outreach occurs when people are united in their core beliefs. But it needs to be recognized that for many, if not most of us, our traditional understanding of Creation, the Fall, and the Cross were central to our conversion experience and are at the core of our individual self-understanding as Adventists; they thus form an integral part of our individual witness and, hence, cannot be compromised. If we work at cross purposes on issues that are part of our own core beliefs, the effect will be to impede the work of the gospel.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, then, I see at least three important consequences for the church if we move away from a six-day creation (there are more)—(1) an inadequate hermeneutic and inconsistent exegetical practice that will undermine confidence in and the authority of God's Word; (2) an undermining of our understanding of salvation, including belief in the Fall, the penalty of sin, and the importance of Christ and the Cross (the doctrine of the soul and of the divine origin

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of humans are also at stake); (3) finally, our ability to witness effectively will be reduced because we will be witnessing to different truths.

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