

## **Development of the Fundamental Beliefs Statement with Particular Reference to the Fundamental Belief #6: Creation**

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From the early days of the Second Advent Movement, Adventists were firm believers in the Creation account of Genesis 1:1-2:3; this text provided a foundation for their conviction that Christians should observe the Sabbath day. As a matter of fact, Adventists regarded the Creation account as “the reason why God blessed and sanctified the seventh day, because ‘in it he had rested from all his work which GOD had created and made.’”<sup>1</sup>

As the Second Advent Movement progressed and the brethren worked to spread the message by various means, one particular publication became the official publication of the movement: *The Adventist Review and the Sabbath Herald*. From August 15 to December 19 of 1854, despite concerns about not establishing any creed beyond the Bible, “a list of five leading doctrines was published in the masthead of the Review and Herald.”<sup>2</sup> Although a reference to the Law of God appeared in the list, there was no direct reference to the doctrine of Creation.

Adventism grew and new biblical truths were uncovered. In 1872, a pamphlet was printed entitled *A Declaration of the Fundamental Principles Taught and Practiced by the Seventh-day Adventists*. It contained 25 unsigned

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<sup>1</sup> James White, “The Weekly Sabbath Instituted at Creation, and not at Sinai,” *The Present Truth*, July 1849, 1.

<sup>2</sup> *SDA Encyclopedia 2000 ed.*, s.v. “Doctrinal Statements, Seventh-day Adventist.”

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propositions that provided a broader picture of what the church, as a body of believers, accepted as its doctrinal teachings. This was later published in the *Signs of the Times* on June 4, 1874, under the title “Fundamental Principles.”<sup>3</sup> It placed more emphasis on God as the Creator of all things, but still made no explicit statement establishing the Creation doctrine as a fundamental principle of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.<sup>4</sup> This particular list was never printed in the *Yearbook* or the *Church Manual*.

“In the 1889 *Yearbook* of the denomination, which was a larger volume than usual, containing general information about the church and its activities, these ‘Fundamental Principles’ were included in a slightly revised and expanded form in Twenty-eight sections (pp. 147–151). This was not continued in subsequent issues, but it was inserted again in the *Yearbook* in 1905 and continued to appear through 1914.”<sup>5</sup> The same 28 statements appeared again in the *Review and Herald* in 1912 and remained as the official fundamental principles of the Seventh-day Adventist Church until 1931.<sup>6</sup> Notice, however, that even in this expanded list of fundamental principles, no specific statement related to the doctrine of Creation appears, but in the first fundamental principle, which deals with God’s attributes, God is referred to as the Creator of all things.

The title “Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists” appeared for the first time in the history of Adventism in the 1931 *Yearbook*, and in 1932 it was also printed in the *Church Manual*.<sup>7</sup> That version contained 22 articles “prepared by a committee of four, including the General Conference president and the editor of the *Review and Herald*.”<sup>8</sup> In this version, the statement on the observance of the Sabbath—the seventh fundamental belief—included the words “memorial of Creation,” making the concept of Creation more evident than its previous versions. Nevertheless, that was as far as it went, and despite much controversy around the world over the issue of origins, no specific statement

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<sup>3</sup> *SDA Encyclopedia 2000 ed.*, s.v. “Doctrinal Statements, Seventh-day Adventist.”

<sup>4</sup> “Fundamental Principles of the Seventh-day Adventists,” *The Signs of the Times*, June 4, 1874.

<sup>5</sup> *SDA Encyclopedia 2000 ed.*, s.v. “Doctrinal Statements, Seventh-day Adventist.”

<sup>6</sup> The Late Uriah Smith, “Fundamental Principles of Seventh-day Adventists,” *Review and Herald*, 4-6.

<sup>7</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Church Manual* (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1932), 180-186.

<sup>8</sup> *SDA Encyclopedia 2000 ed.*, s.v. “Doctrinal Statements, Seventh-day Adventist.”

about Creation was added and this version remained the official statement of Seventh-day Adventist fundamental beliefs until 1980.<sup>9</sup>

### 27 Fundamental Beliefs and Their Origin

For almost 50 years, the Seventh-day Adventist Church endorsed those 22 articles of fundamental beliefs, publishing them in the *Yearbook* and *Church Manual* with only minor revisions. Then, on April 25, 1980, the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists in session took a vote on what became known as the Twenty-Seven Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, also referred to as “a summary of the principle features of Adventist beliefs.”<sup>10</sup>

This was the first formulated set of fundamental beliefs to include an explicit statement on Creation. It was inserted into the fundamental beliefs statement during major revisions that included the addition of seven new articles, including “paragraphs on angels, Creation and the fall, the church, unity in the body of Christ, the Lord’s supper, Christian marriage, and the Christian home and education.”<sup>11</sup>

Since the focus of this research is the development of the statement on Creation, it is crucial to be aware that the statement as it reads today on the General Conference website and in the *Church Manual* is the result of an extensive rewriting process that completely transformed the original statement proposed by B. E. Seton, which was approved by the General Conference Ad Hoc Committee and then sent to Andrews University for input from a group of theologians.<sup>12</sup>

The result of the work done by that group of theologians was published in an earlier version by the *Adventist Review* on February 21, 1980. There, the sixth fundamental belief reads:

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<sup>9</sup> *SDA Encyclopedia 2000 ed.*, s.v. “Doctrinal Statements, Seventh-day Adventist.”

<sup>10</sup> General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists, *Yearbook of the Seventh-Day Adventist Denomination*, (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1931), 377–380. and s.v. “SDA Encyclopedia.”

<sup>11</sup> W. Duncan Eva, to X-1535 Church Manual Revision—“Fundamental Beliefs.” Members of ad hoc committee, August 10, 1979. W. Duncan Eva Collection, Office of Archives & Statistics, Silver Spring, MD. Note that an article on “Angels” was never voted as part of the final statement approved on the GC Session of 1980.

<sup>12</sup> *SDA Encyclopedia 2000 ed.*, s.v. “Doctrinal Statements, Seventh-day Adventist.”

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That God, through Christ and by the power of His Spirit, is creator of all things, and has revealed in Scripture the only authentic account of His creative activity. In six days the Lord made “the heavens 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. (Gen. 1-3; Ex. 20:8-11; Ps. 19:1-6; 33:6-9; John 1:1-3; Col. 1:16, 17.)<sup>13</sup>

The statement published in the *Adventist Review* on February 21, 1980 was “the first revised draft of the statement [which] was circulated among a group of theologians for their input.”<sup>14</sup> In light of this latter allegation, some important questions arise and must be addressed.

First, why did the Seventh-day Adventist Church feel the need to include a statement on Creation in its fundamental beliefs? Second, who were the key Seventh-day Adventist authors, and how did they contribute to the formulation of the statement on Creation? Third, what was the process used by the General Conference to prepare the new statement on the fundamental beliefs, and who were the key individuals involved in that process? Fourth, did the original X-1535 statement on Creation proposed by the Ad Hoc Committee and sent to Andrews University differ from what was published in February 1980 in the *Adventist Review*? Fifth, what was the contribution by the Andrews’ scholars to the final statement on Creation? In the next section, I will elaborate on these questions; the complexity of these questions requires that they be approached carefully.

#### **Why a Statement on Creation?**

The period in which the Seventh-day Adventist Church emerged was one of extreme importance. The year 1844 entered the annals of world history not only as the year of the Great Disappointment, but also as the year when Charles

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<sup>13</sup> Kenneth H. Wood, “Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists,” *Adventist Review*, 8.

<sup>14</sup> *SDA Encyclopedia 2000 ed.*, s.v. “Doctrinal Statements, Seventh-day Adventist.”

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Darwin published *The Origin*, also known as the 1844 Sketch, which became *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* in 1859.<sup>15</sup>

In order to gain a full understanding of the nuances of the Creation vs. evolution debate, one must take the Great Controversy as the most basic presupposition. When looked at through the frame of the Great Controversy, these two major historical events can be seen as portraying two opposite ideals: the first as the work of God in history seeking to bring the human race back to the study and understanding of the Bible by the use of *Sola, Tota, and Prima Scriptura*, and the second as the work of another entity seeking to lead the human race away from the Bible and toward a humanistic understanding of all things.<sup>16</sup> This is not linked exclusively to the works of Charles Darwin, but also to the works throughout history that served as a foundation for the development of Darwin's work on origins.<sup>17</sup> Hence, the biblical teaching of Creation came

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<sup>15</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection: or, The Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1985), 11–48.

<sup>16</sup> For information on the *Great Controversy* see Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy: The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan*, 4 vols., *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 4 (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1884).

<sup>17</sup> Some hinge moments are: (1) 405 A.D. when Augustine accommodates Scripture to science Augustine and Taylor, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*. (2) 1605 A.D. with Bacon proposition to remove purpose from biological studies Francis Bacon and Thomas Markby, *The Advancement of Learning* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1898). (3) 1635 A.D. in Descartes' famous turn to the subject René Descartes and others, *Discourse on Method, The Focus Philosophical Library* (Newburyport, MA: Focus, 2007). (4) In 1748 A.D. Hume challenges miracles in David Hume and Charles William Hendel, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 1st ed., *The Library of Liberal Arts* 49 (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Educational, 1955). (5) In 1771 Semler separates the concept "Word of God" from Scripture in his *On the Free Investigation of the Canon*, Joh Salomo Semler and Heinz Scheible, *Abhandlung Von Freier Untersuchung des Canon, Texte zur Kirchen- und Theologiegeschichte, Heft 5* ((Gütersloh): Mohn, 1967). (6) In 1785 A.D. James Hutton, known today as "the father of modern geology," discovery the geologic column introducing a revolution of Copernican proportions James Hutton, *Theory of The Earth, Historiæ naturalis classica t, 1* (Braunschweig, Germany; New York, NY: J. Cramer; Stechert-Hafner Service Agency, 1972). (7) In 1821–1822, Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher, recognized as "the father of modern liberal theology," in turns to the subject in theology to avoid attacks from science Friedrich Schleiermacher and Carl Stange, *Schleiermachers Glaubenslehre* (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1910). See also Schleiermacher and Lücke, *On the Glaubenslehre: Two Letters to Dr. Lücke*.

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under severe attack, leading many individuals and institutions to renounce their trust in the biblical chronicle of origins.<sup>18</sup>

During the 136 years from 1844 until 1980, the very foundation of the Bible was under worldwide attack. Seventh-day Adventists were well aware of the discussions taking place in other institutions around the world, especially those in the educational realm, and they stood up to defend the biblical teachings on origins through the writings of Ellen G. White and many books and articles published by other authors.<sup>19</sup>

Even more emphatic, perhaps, was the appeal of the retiring president of the General Conference, who was very familiar with the growing issues related to origins among Seventh-day Adventists. In his speech presented to the Annual Council on October 12, 1978, Pierson stressed:

Already, brethren and sisters, there are subtle forces that are beginning to stir. Regrettably there are those in the church who belittle the inspiration of the total Bible, who scorn the first 11 chapters of Genesis, who question the Spirit of Prophecy's short chronology of the age of the earth, and who subtly and not so subtly attack the Spirit of Prophecy. There are some who point to the reformers and contemporary theologians as a source and the norm for Seventh-day Adventist doctrine. There are those who allegedly are tired of the hackneyed phrases of Adventism. There are those who wish to forget the standards of the church we love. There are those who covet and would court the favor of the evangelicals; those who would throw off the mantle of a peculiar people; and those who would go the way of the secular, materialistic world.

Fellow leaders, beloved brethren and sisters—don't let it happen! I appeal to you as earnestly as I know how this morning—don't let it happen! I appeal to Andrews University, to the Seminary, to Loma Linda University—

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<sup>18</sup> Schleiermacher and Lücke, *On the Glaubenslehre: Two Letters to Dr. Lücke*.

<sup>19</sup> For information on SDA authors that wrote on the issue of evolution from mid 19th century and early 20th century, see J. N. Andrews, *History of the Sabbath* (n.p.: 1887); A. J. Gordon, "Christian Science not Scriptural," *Review and Herald*, October 2, 627-628; A. T. Jones, "Creation or Evolution: Which?," *Review and Herald*, February 21, 115, 116; A. T. Jones, "Creation or Evolution: Which? (Conclude)," *Review and Herald*, March 7, 136; A. T. Jones, "Creation or Evolution: Which? (Continuation)," *Review and Herald*, February 28, 146-147; W. H. Littlejohn, "The Battle Creek College: What it is Not, and What it is," *Review and Herald*, January 22, 51; W. H. Littlejohn, "The Temple in Heaven," *Review and Herald*, March 3, 129-131.

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don't let it happen! We are not Seventh-day Anglicans, not Seventh-day Lutherans—we are Seventh-day Adventists! This is God's last church with God's last message!<sup>20</sup>

Pierson's statement complied with the history of Seventh-day Adventists and provided the ultimate reason for the formulation of a statement on Creation.

**Standing In Defense of God**

One of the first to raise his voice in defense of God's Word in the matter was Elder W. H. Littlejohn, who in 1884 published a small but significant article in the *Review and Herald* complimenting the faculty of Battle Creek College for their transparent and solid position regarding origins. Littlejohn stressed that “[f]ortunately, all of the professors of the College are not only professors of religion themselves, but they are also firm believers in the inspiration of the Scriptures, and interpret them in harmony with their most literal and obvious sense.”<sup>21</sup> Littlejohn also emphasized the contrast between the recently formed Seventh-day Adventist college and other educational institutions, where it became “confessedly true that the leaven of evolutionism ha[d] entered largely into the theories of many of the college professors of [that] time, and that many of them openly avow and publicly teach doctrines in harmony with what is styled the ‘higher criticism.’”<sup>22</sup>

Another record presenting Seventh-day Adventists as active participants in the Creation vs. evolution debate appeared in the *Review and Herald* in 1887. In that volume, an unsigned article quoted a “Prof. Virchow, of Germany, [speaking] before the congress of scientists at Wiesbaden,” who categorically expressed his disapproval of the Darwinian theory by affirming that

the Darwinian doctrine of the transmutation of species and of mechanical evolution, the theories upon which it is now sought to construct so much science and a great deal of morality, and which it has become very unpopular, if not a sign of dense ignorance, to doubt, are fundamentally false, unscientific, and impossible; and that science can no longer afford to move

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<sup>20</sup> Robert H. Pierson, “An Earnest Appeal From the Retiring President of the General Conference,” *Review and Herald*, 10, 11.

<sup>21</sup> Littlejohn, “The Battle Creek College: What it is Not, and What it is,” 51.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

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along a line which seeks to construct its phenomena upon imaginary and impossible bases.<sup>23</sup>

A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner wrote extensively on the issue of evolution, making significant contributions to the Seventh-day Adventist body of work on the subject.<sup>24</sup> Other key figures from the early twentieth century include William W. Prescott, J. N. Andrews, and William H. Branson. None of them, however, despite their valuable contributions, would impact the Christian world as much as George McCready Price, recognized by some scholars as “the chief architect of the flood geology or scientific Creation.”<sup>25</sup>

#### **Who Was George McCready Price?**

To describe the life of a giant of the Christian faith in just a few paragraphs is an impossible task. Professor Price’s sixty-plus years of publication and teaching are certainly a subject to be analyzed in a much longer document; however, this paper will give a brief overview of his life and some of his published work, and discuss his theological ideas in an attempt to verify his claims in favor of the integrity of the biblical text regarding the Creation and flood.

Born in New Brunswick, Canada on August 26, 1870, the author and educator George McCready Price became a Seventh-day Adventist in his early years. Price was a dedicated member of the church, and served initially as a colporteur, but would later become the most important writer in Creationism until the mid-twentieth century. The author of many books and articles, Price dedicated his life to the literal interpretation of the Bible and the advancement of the so-called flood geology or scientific Creation. In the scholarly world, George McCready Price is seen and quoted with the highest respect. Henry M. Morris, in *History of Modern Creationism*, stresses the importance of Price’s “tremendous breadth of knowledge in science and Scripture, his careful logic,

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<sup>23</sup> *Review and Herald*, “Another Blow at Evolution,” *Review and Herald*, December 6, 758.

<sup>24</sup> Jones, “Creation or Evolution: Which?,” 115, 116.

<sup>25</sup> Ronald L. Numbers, *The Creationists*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (New York, NY: A. A. Knopf, 1992), x, 72-101. For additional information see Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994).188–195; Numbers, 72–101.

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and his beautiful writing style [which] made a profound impression on me when I first began studying these great themes. . . .<sup>26</sup>

Although George McCready Price started his work without any formal education, he received a B.A. from Loma Linda College in 1912 and “carried membership in both the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the California Academy of Science.”<sup>27</sup> During his long career as a professor at different Adventist colleges and an active advocate of scientific Creation, Price earned the respect of many scholars of his time and future generations. His 92 years of life were a major contribution to the cause of biblical literalism and a clearer understanding of the Creation account and universal flood.

In his early twenties, Professor Price took charge of a school in the village of Tracadie, Canada and became acquainted with the evolutionary theory by reading many books on the subject, which were offered by “Dr. Smith, the medical superintendent of the [local] hospital.”<sup>28</sup> After a few years of incessant reading, Price had collected enough information to allow for a first publication, which was the beginning of Price’s long crusade for Creationism. Price noted the impact of the work of Sir Charles Lyell, James Hutton, and Charles Darwin in the Christian academic world and how it caused Christians to try to harmonize the Bible with geological discoveries by adopting theories such as that God creates through the evolutionary process.

For George McCready Price, the biblical text was not to be modified or compromised to fit modern ideas. As Harold W. Clark puts it:

Price’s *Outlines of Modern Science*, in contrast with all this, was an effort, as he put it, to get back to primitive Christian principles without any compromise. He said: “A reform and a return to these primitive principles is the next thing in order for everyone who wishes to get his bearings toward the present day problems of either politics or science.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Henry M. Morris, *A History of Modern Creationism* (San Diego, CA: Master Book Publishers, 1984), 88.

<sup>27</sup> Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 91.

<sup>28</sup> Harold W. Clark, *Crusader for Creation: The Life and Writings of George McCready Price*, A Destiny Book, D-110 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1966), 14, 15.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

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It is fair to suggest that “Price could well be called the father of the twentieth-century Creationist movement.”<sup>30</sup> Such affirmation comes as a reward for Price’s loyalty to the Bible, added to his knowledge of geology, Scripture, and Spirit of Prophecy, which served as the foundation for his theology.

#### **Appeal From a General Conference Official**

When the stage was set and the Seventh-day Adventist Church was moving forward in preparing a statement on Creation to be incorporated into its fundamental beliefs, W. J. Hackett, vice president of the General Conference at that time, published a significant guest editorial in the *Review* stressing the importance of maintaining the course set for the church leaders by those who preceded them. Hackett was aware of the challenges faced by the church, and he advised:

Areas to be explored are those concerning the church’s positions that have been challenged. Some fall in the area of science and include topics such as a literal, seven-day Creation, a universal Flood, and the age of life on the earth. A clear definition here will enable teachers of science in our schools clearly to present to inquiring young minds the church’s position.<sup>31</sup>

Although the process of formulating the statement on Creation was democratic and well documented, did the final result achieve the clarity suggested by Hackett and the Ad Hoc Committee?

#### **Formulating a Statement on Creation**

In the subsequent discussion, it should be noted that all the events presented in this section are documented in the archives of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Silver Spring, MD. It is my goal to present only facts that I have found in those historical documents and other documents found on the GC Archives website, in books, and in various magazine articles. Although my personal views may differ from some of those voiced during the events surrounding the 1980 statement on Creation, I have endeavored to be balanced in my portrayal of the historical record.

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<sup>30</sup> Raoul Dederen, *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, Commentary reference series v. 12 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 12:450.

<sup>31</sup> W. J. Hackett, “Preserve the Landmarks,” *Review and Herald*, May 26, 1977, 2.

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Although some discussion may have taken place earlier, the concentrated effort to prepare a statement on Creation started officially on June 8, 1978, when the General Conference Committee voted to appoint an Ad Hoc Creation and Revelation Statements Editing Committee.<sup>32</sup> The members of that committee were “W. Duncan Eva (Chairman); G. M. Hyde (Secretary), Milo Anderson, Roger Coon, Raoul Dederen, Richard Fearing, W. J. Hackett, Richard Hammill, Frank Holbrook, Warren H. Johns, Alf Lohne, James Londis, Robert W. Olson, Jack Provonsha, Ariel Roth, Cree Sandefur, William C. Jr. Scales, G. Ralph Thompson, Mervyn Warren, K. H. Wood, and E. E. Zinke.”<sup>33</sup>

The work of the Ad Hoc Committee was done mainly by correspondence. In my research, I found that over the next 10 months—from June 1978 until August 1979—the members of the Ad Hoc Committee exchanged numerous letters as they sought to prepare a statement on Creation that accurately reflected the Seventh-day Adventist position on a recent, literal six-day Creation.

Based on denominational minutes dated September 8, 1978, it seems accurate to suggest that an initial document containing a tentative statement on Creation had been prepared and presented to the X-1535 Church Manual Committee prior to that date.<sup>34</sup> On that occasion, “[t]he chairman shared copies of B. E. Seton’s comments and suggestions regarding the Fundamental Beliefs section of the Church Manual. Members of the committee were urged to give careful study to the suggested revisions and to make notes.”<sup>35</sup> One of Seton’s comments pointed out the inadequacy of that very first statement on Creation. In February 1979, after about five months of work, “a tentative revision of the ‘Fundamental Beliefs’ as prepared by B. E. Seton” was brought to the X-1535 Committee, where the chairman of that committee “stressed the need for a clearer statement concerning Creation.”<sup>36</sup>

As a result of the concerns raised by B. E. Seton, in a more concentrated effort to develop the statement on Creation, the X-1535 Committee voted “to ask

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<sup>32</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (Washington, DC), Minutes of Meetings of the General Conference Committee, meeting of 8 June 1978.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (Washington, DC), Minutes of Meetings of the (X-1535) Church Manual Committee, meeting of 8 September 1978.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (Washington, DC), Minutes of Meetings of the (X-1535) Church Manual Committee, 14-15 February 1979, meeting of 14 February 1979.

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W. J. Hackett, R. Hammill and B. E. Seton to form a subcommittee for the formulation of a statement on the doctrine of Creation; also voting to have B. E. Seton serving as the secretary of the full subcommittee.”<sup>37</sup> By the end of the next day, the X-1535 Church Manual Revision Committee–Fundamental Beliefs had approved a tentative statement on Creation. Document 1 shows the final paragraph of the minutes of that meeting.

Although no biblical references were provided at that stage, it is extremely important to note the appearance of some specific words in the statement, such as “reliable chronicle of the creation of the world,” “In six literal, consecutive days God created the world,” and finally “world-wide Noachian flood.” The reader can readily capture the concept of biblical literalism in this statement, and although the statement would later undergo massive revisions and editorial work, it reflected a response in the right direction to Hackett’s article inviting the church leaders of those days to “preserve the landmarks” of biblical historicity.<sup>38</sup>

**Document 1-A Tentative Statement on Creation Voted On by the X-1535 Committee**

Creation After lengthy consideration of the paragraph suggested by the subcommittee, VOTED, To recommend the adoption of the following paragraph as an additional “Fundamental Belief” to express SDA convictions concerning creation:

Fundamental Belief -- Creation  
-- A Tentative Statement

That God is the Creator of all things. The book of Genesis contains the only inspired, reliable chronicle of the creation of the world. It provides the framework for our understanding of the natural world and of all creation. In six literal, consecutive days God created the world, all living things upon it, and their supporting environment. The Lord then established the seventh-day Sabbath as the perpetual memorial of His finished creative work. The Bible gives the basic account of the creation of man in the image of God, the defacement of that image by man’s fall into sin, and the consequent world-wide Noachian flood. But Scripture also declares that God will restore creation’s original perfection after the Second Coming of His Son and the eradication of sin from the universe.

W. Duncan Eva, chairman

B. E. Seton, secretary

The subcommittee continued working to improve the statement on Creation so that it would be ready before the session of the General Conference in April of 1980. On March 4, 1979, B. E. Seton provided the X-1535 Committee with new revisions to the statement. Documents 2 and 3 show the full statement being

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Hackett, 2.

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edited (Document 2), including some Bible texts, and the suggested alterations (Document 3).<sup>39</sup>

Some of the improvements in this last revision presented a more solid biblical foundation, as seen in the meeting of the X-1535 Committee on April 9 and 10 of 1979. They included an allusion to the Trinity, a specific reference to Satan as the originator of sin, and a reference to the Garden of Eden, indicating a literal interpretation of the Bible that was frequently observed by other Christian denominations.<sup>40</sup>

Satisfied with the progress achieved up to that point, on July 23, 1979, the X-1535 Church Manual Revision Committee–Fundamental Beliefs agreed that the chairman [W. Duncan Eva] should approach Andrews University with a view to arranging a meeting with solicited members of the Theological Faculty to obtain their input on the revised fundamental beliefs as prepared by this committee. It was therefore suggested that Elders W. D. Eva, W. J. Hackett and Dr. R. Hammill meet with theologians on a convenient date on the Andrews University campus.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Bernard E. Seton, “Suggestion for Statement of Belief on Creation,” in X-1535 Church Manual Revision Committee – Fundamental Beliefs (Washington, DC: General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, 1979).

<sup>40</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (Washington, DC), Minutes of Meetings of the (X-1535) Church Manual Committee, 9-10 April 1979, meeting of 9 April 1979.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* A brief reference to this event can be found at Encyclopedia.

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**Document 2-Full Suggestive Statement on Creation During Formulation Procedures**

Suggestion for Statement of Belief on CREATION

That God <sup>the Father,</sup> with Christ and ~~by the agency of~~ the Holy Spirit, is the Creator of all things. He spoke into existence the world, and all living creatures upon it with their supporting environment in six literal consecutive days; then institut~~ed~~<sup>ed</sup> the seventh-day Sabbath as the perpetual memorial of His completed creative work. [Man was originally made in the image of God, but his sin defaced that image and led to the world-wide Noachian flood.] Through Christ, God will eradicate sin and its results from the universe and restore the pristine perfection of His creation in a new heavens and a new earth at the close of human history. Gen. 1:1-26; Ps. 33:6,9.

D D Seton 3. 4. 79

**Document 3-Alteration Suggested to the Portion Between the Brackets**

Man was originally created in the image of God, but his fall into sin in response to Satan's temptation in the Garden of Eden, resulted in the progressive defacement of that image. It also ~~resulted~~<sup>led to</sup> in the marring of God's handiwork in creation, ~~particularly as a consequence of~~<sup>and to</sup> the world-wide Noachian flood in the days of Noah

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After all the work put into the formulation of a Seventh-day Adventist statement of Creation, this single move would soon take W. J. Hackett's appeal to "preserve the landmarks" of biblical history and turn to its complete opposite, undermining all those landmarks.

With the important task ahead of having the final proposed statement of fundamental beliefs analyzed by the church's top theologians, the X-1535 Committee prepared a three-column document to be mailed to reviewers of the statement. The first column included the 22 articles that had been printed in the *Church Manual* since 1932; the second column showed all the alterations to that version and the new articles; and finally, the third column showed the revised fundamental belief statement, although it did not include the articles being added to the statement. W. Duncan Eva mailed copies of this document to Andrews University and to a group of church leaders on August 10, 1979.<sup>42</sup>

For many years, researchers tried to locate this three-column document without success. Those interested in locating it believed that the statement on Creation originally prepared by the X-1535 Committee was more specific from a biblical point of view and more clearly reflected the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of Creation. But the document would not be easy to locate.

### **Searching for the Three-Column Document**

At the beginning of my research, I used all the sources readily available: the Internet, including the GC Archives website; the Center for Adventist Research at Andrews University; and direct personal contact with professors at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary. Although these sources all contributed enormously in one way or another, the most fruitful step in this study was the research I conducted in person on March 15-17, 2010 at the Archives of the General Conference.

Mr. Bert Haloviak, Director of the Archives and Statistics of the General Conference, kindly granted me permission to access the Archives. Mr. Peter Chiomenti, Assisting Director of the Archives, separated all the material available on the history of the fundamental belief statement of 1980. Accompanied by my two young sons, Matheus and Gabriel, who were going to serve as my "research assistants" and run the scanner, I arrived in the office of

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<sup>42</sup> W. Duncan Eva, to X-1535 Church Manual Revision—"Fundamental Beliefs" Members of ad hoc committee, August 10, 1979. W. Duncan Eva Collection, Office of Archives & Statistics, Silver Springs, MD.

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Archives and Statistics to find eight storage boxes filled with material on the fundamental beliefs, including the personal files of W. Duncan Eva.

On my second day of research I located the three-column document sent by the X-1535 Committee to Andrews University. As Dr. Lawrence Geraty correctly pointed out, the three-column document had a cover letter stating, “At this stage this document is confidential and intended only for those to whom it is sent. It may not be copied or duplicated in any way.”<sup>43</sup> The differences between the 1980 statement on Creation and the one originally prepared by the X-1535 Committee are significant.<sup>44</sup> Document 4 shows the statement proposed by the X-1535 Committee that was sent to Andrews University on August 10, 1979.

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<sup>43</sup> Lawrence Geraty, “A New Statement of Fundamental Beliefs,” *Spectrum*, 4.

<sup>44</sup> W. Duncan Eva, “Proposal for the 1980 Statement on Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists, 1980,” W. Duncan Eva Material on Fundamental Beliefs 1980 - 1981, Silver Spring, MD. See Appendix A and B.

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**Document 4 - Final Proposal by X-1535 Committee**

**7. Creation and the Fall**

That the book of Genesis contains the only inspired, reliable chronicle of the creation of the world, and that God, with Christ and the Holy Spirit, is Creator of all things. In six literal days the Lord made heaven and the earth and all living things upon it with their supporting environment. The Lord then established the seventh day as the Sabbath, a perpetual memorial of His completed creative work. Man was originally created in the image of God, but his fall into sin in response to Satan's temptation in the Garden of Eden resulted in the progressive defacement of that image. It also led to marring God's handiwork in creation and to the

**Document 4 - (Continuation)**

worldwide flood in the days of Noah. Through Christ, God will eradicate sin and its results from the universe and at the close of human history restore the pristine perfection of His creation in a new heavens and a new earth. (Gen. 1:1-26; Ps. 33:6-9; Gen. 3:1-24; Ex. 20:8-11; Gen. 6-8; Rev.21:1-7.)

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A parallel comparison of the Ad-hoc proposed X-1535 statement on Creation and the actual voted statement on Creation in the April 25, 1980 at General Conference session reveals that the X-1535 underwent complete revision by the “committee of twelve,” as Geraty acknowledges.<sup>45</sup>

**Table 1 – Comparison of Statements**

X- 1535 Proposal Statement on Creation Sent to Andrews University <sup>46</sup>	Statement on Creation Returned From Andrews University <sup>47</sup>
<p>That the book of Genesis contains the only inspired, reliable chronicle of the Creation of the world, and that God [the Father], with Christ and the Holy Spirit, is Creator of all things. In six literal days the Lord made heaven and the earth and all living things upon it with their supporting environment. The Lord then established the seventh day as the Sabbath, a perpetual memorial of His completed creative work. Man was originally created in the image of God, but his fall into sin in response to Satan's temptation in the Garden of Eden resulted in the progressive defacement of that image. It also led to marring God's handiwork in Creation and to the worldwide flood in the days of Noah. Through Christ, God will eradicate sin and its results from the universe and at the close of human history restore the pristine perfection of His Creation in a new heavens and a new earth (Gen 1:1-26; Ps 33:6-9; Gen 3:1-24; Exo 20:8-11; Gen 6-8; Rev 21:1-7).</p>	<p>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. (Gen. 1; 2; Ex. 20:8-11; Ps. 19:1-6; 33:6, 9; 104; Heb. 11:3.)</p>

<sup>45</sup> Geraty, 5.

<sup>46</sup> Eva, “Proposal for the 1980 Statement on Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists.” See Appendix A and B.

<sup>47</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Church Manual* (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1981), 33.

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According to Dr. Fritz Guy, who was also a member of the “committee of twelve” at Andrews University—who served as its secretary—Dr. Lawrence Geraty drafted the completely new statement on Creation.<sup>48</sup> As can be observed, some important words that were serving as agents of specificity, were eliminated from the new formulated statement.

For instance, the clause “That the book of Genesis contains the only inspired, reliable chronicle of the Creation of the world” worked as an agent of specificity. The use of the term “chronicle” clarifies that Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as historically trustworthy.<sup>49</sup> Another agent of specificity was the clause “In six literal days the Lord made heaven and the earth and all living things.” The term “literal” indicates that Seventh-day Adventists accept the concept that each day, evening and morning, found in the Mosaic account of Creation describes a period of 24 hours and therefore a historical day. This also provides solid support of their belief in the Sabbath day as the “perpetual memorial of His completed creative work.”<sup>50</sup> Finally, of extreme significance were the words, “It also led to marring God’s handiwork in Creation and to the worldwide flood in the days of Noah,” which would ultimately testify to the world that Seventh-day Adventists endorse the biblical version of the Creation events, including that short chronology of the history of this planet and that a global flood necessarily links to these events. Understandably, the reader may now ask: Why were these agents of specificity left out of the new statement on Creation? Furthermore, is the current statement on Creation clearly representing mainline Seventh-day Adventists regarding origins? Since these questions are too important to simply be ignored, we shall turn to these important questions in the next section.

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<sup>48</sup> Guy, Fritz. “Uncovering the Origins of the Statement of Twenty-seven Fundamental Beliefs,” <http://www.sdanet.org/atissue/doctrines/au2002conference/guy/guy27origin.htm#11> (accessed 03/25/2010), 5.

<sup>49</sup> Definition of “chronicle”: “an historical account of events arranged in order of time usually without analysis or interpretation.” 11th ed. s.v. “*Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*.”

<sup>50</sup> Gerhard F. Hasel, “The ‘Days’ of Creation in Genesis 1: Literal ‘Days’ or Figurative ‘Periods/EPOCHS’ of Time?,” *Origins*, 5-38.

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### **The Purpose of the Fundamental Belief Statement**

It is crucial to understand the purpose of having a statement of fundamental beliefs. In the case of Seventh-day Adventists, the preamble reads: “Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the *church’s understanding and expression* of the teaching of Scripture.”<sup>51</sup> This indicates that the statement of fundamental beliefs exists to reflect the teachings and beliefs of the church, which are to be represented by its members. Thus, it implies that church members are to abide by those principles, rather than the church abiding by the beliefs of its members.

Nevertheless, in the minds of some Adventists, “there is no single ‘Seventh-day Adventist Church position’ regarding the history of life on Earth. Individual Adventists—scientists, theologians, pastors, and others—hold widely differing views regarding the age of the universe, of the planet Earth, and of life on Earth.”<sup>52</sup> Such a declaration reveals a subjective understanding of ecclesiology, in which the church and its doctrines must be subject to the views of its members, and not to Scripture.

In response to the claims stated in the previous paragraph, I have examined the reasons for the changes made to the original statement on Creation and why it was worded in such a way. Guy, the secretary of the “Committee of Twelve,” shares his assessment of the meaning of the newly worded Fundamental Belief #6 as follows: “The only ‘official position’ of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is stated in Fundamental Belief #6, where the language is deliberately Biblical, and broad enough to accommodate various views about Earth’s natural history.”<sup>53</sup> This means that Fundamental Belief #6, as it reads today, can be used to support any approach to the biblical account of Creation, including progressive Creationism, theistic evolution, etc.

The next section considers the discussion related to Fundamental Belief #6 that took place in 1980 during the General Conference Session in Dallas, TX.

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<sup>51</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Church Manual* (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1981), 31. Emphasis Supplied.

<sup>52</sup> Fritz Guy, “Seven Considerations for Productive Conversation About the History of Life on Planet Earth,” *Spectrum*, June 18, 2009.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

**The Creation Statement on the Floor of the GC Session**

The day started with Neal C. Wilson addressing the delegates, emphasizing the importance of leaders refusing to be content with the status quo just because it was comfortable. He stated: “An organization is developed to achieve an objective. Organization should not continue simply to maintain itself. Unless there are clear targets, organization is meaningless.”<sup>54</sup> Unquestionably, revising the existing fundamental belief statement and inserting an official statement on Creation testifies to Seventh-day Adventist leaders’ strong desire to honor God’s Word and message. This researcher does not disagree with such intent; yet, after thirty years of controversies and concerns, it is important to reflect on the method used and in the observations made on the floor that evening, many of which were simply left behind.

After J. W. Bothe had read the proposed statement on Creation, Leroy Moore, with the support of A. A. Roth, manifested his concern regarding the wording of Belief #6, which he believed should leave some room for the Spirit of Prophecy to contribute to the biblical account. Another observation came from E. J. Humphrey, who inquired about the possibility of including the words “six literal days,” which would clearly distinguish Seventh-day Adventists from many other denominations.<sup>55</sup> In support of the latter, John V. Stevens stressed that one of the purposes for rewriting the fundamental beliefs and including a statement on Creation was to make what Seventh-day Adventists believe “more easily understood by those not of our faith”,<sup>56</sup> thus, adding the words “six literal days” to that statement “would certainly let the world know what we believe.”<sup>57</sup>

Others like Humberto R. Treiyer pointed out the importance of including “something in relation to our position about the earth’s chronology.”<sup>58</sup> Neal C. Wilson responded with openness to these revisions; nevertheless, none of the attending delegates picked up on Wilson’s openness.<sup>59</sup> At that point, Lawrence Geraty brought up the fact that “Creation is far more extensive than just

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<sup>54</sup> General Conference Bulletin No. 6, “Eight Business Meeting: Fifty-third General Conference Session, April 22, 1980, 9:30 A.M. Session Proceedings Continue From Bulletin 5,” *Review and Herald*, April 24, 1980, 14.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 20. Emphasis Supplied.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

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origins.”<sup>60</sup> He further stated, “In a paragraph on Creation, I would like to testify to the world that *God does not work*, as deists believe, *by getting things started and then allowing them to run their course*. I would like to include creative activity that includes not only origins but much more.”<sup>61</sup>

I certainly agree with Dr. Geraty if by “origins” he was referring to an absolute beginning, a time when “the earth was without form and void” (Gen 1:2), and if by “Creation” he was referring to God’s actions of giving form and bringing life to the planet He spoke into existence, and maintaining that life after its initial creation, which seems to be the case here. Unfortunately, Geraty’s words could also be interpreted to support theistic evolution in that the latter position also requires God’s continued “creative activity” after the initial creation by occasional divine intrusions into nature to help it overcome evolutionary “logjams.” The divine intrusions that theistic evolution requires are much more extensive and involved than the divine ongoing maintenance understood by more conservative Adventist creationists. Indeed, such intrusions would make void the significance and quality of God’s initial creation which is said to be “very good” (Gen 1:31). If one of the reasons for writing a statement on Creation is to “let the world know what we believe,” as John V. Stevens correctly stated, specificity and clarity are of major importance and are non-negotiable.

Despite the observations presented on the floor favoring a clearer wording for the statement on Creation, one that would reflect more accurately what mainline Seventh-day Adventists truly believe, the published discussion regarding the Creation statement ended shortly after Dr. Geraty’s statement quoted above. As mentioned elsewhere, the twenty-seven new fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church were voted into effect on the morning of April 25, 1980. How the statement on Creation would affect the church, and why those involved in preparing the statement worded it the way they did, were things that only the future would clearly reveal.

In the next section, I analyze some of the consequences resulting from the lack of specificity of the current official statement on Creation.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

### **The Fruits of the 1980 Statement on Creation**

Despite the fact that the committee of twelve produced a statement of fundamental beliefs that raised many theological concerns and controversies among mainline Seventh-day Adventists, it is important to recognize their efforts and contributions. For instance, Larry Geraty expressed his concerns regarding the time allotted for such an important task, and the members of the committee suggested a more appropriate procedure for future revisions of the fundamental beliefs statement that would extend the time allocated for the process. They suggested that all “the results of [their] effort, if acceptable to Washington, D.C., be published in the *Adventist Review* with the invitation for comment and reaction by any concerned.”<sup>62</sup>

On the other hand, Robert H. Pierson stressed the importance of Seventh-day Adventist leaders positioning themselves against “those in the church who belittle the inspiration of the total Bible, who scorn the first 11 chapters of Genesis, who question the Spirit of Prophecy’s short chronology of the age of the earth.”<sup>63</sup> Pierson’s words supported Hackett’s appeal that providing “a clear definition” on these issues “will enable teachers of science in our schools clearly to present to inquiring young minds the church’s position.”<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, somewhere during the task of “revising” the statement on Creation, the notion of producing a document to clearly represent what Seventh-day Adventists believe was lost—but not without consequences.

Among Seventh-day Adventists, a new discussion connected to the history of Fundamental Belief #6 is that over the teaching of evolutionary theory as a preferable model of origins at La Sierra University in Riverside, CA.

### **The La Sierra University in Focus**

The first known objection to the teaching of evolutionary theory at La Sierra University was a letter sent to former General Conference President Jan Paulsen by Dr. Sean Pitman on March 16, 2009, informing the former president of the ongoing teaching of theistic evolution in the biology department of LSU.<sup>65</sup> About

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<sup>62</sup> Geraty, 3.

<sup>63</sup> Pierson, 10, 11.

<sup>64</sup> Hackett, 2.

<sup>65</sup> Jan Paulsen, by Sean Pitman, March 16, 2009, Letter to Jan Paulsen by Sean Pitman, EducateTruth.com. Silver Spring, MD.

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six weeks later, David Asscherick sent an email to Pastors Jan Paulsen, Don C. Schneider, and Ricardo Graham regarding the same matter.<sup>66</sup>

Asscherick was conscious of the fact that our schools should allow space for the teaching of various theories of origins, and he stated, “It is a matter of incontestable fact that naturalistic evolution is being taught at La Sierra University. This is not in and of itself a bad thing. Evolution should be taught at our denominational universities.” He continued, “But it should be taught as a competing and inimical worldview to the biblical worldview.”<sup>67</sup>

On May 18, Randal Wisbey, president of LSU, wrote to the board of trustees and others in response to “a recent letter” that had been circulating on the Internet:

In particular, this letter charges that “naturalistic evolution” is taught at La Sierra University—even while suggesting that evolution should be taught at our Adventist colleges and universities so that our students can better understand the world in which they live. “Naturalistic evolution” is a phrase that either in code or direct definition implies a perspective of “atheistic evolution.”

We reject this implied atheistic charge. Every one of our science faculty share the goal of students experiencing a vibrant Adventist Christian faith while pursuing their education in the sciences.<sup>68</sup>

Wisbey’s declaration seems to employ the same line of argumentation used by other Adventist scholars who reject mainline Adventist thinking: they present their ideas through indirect declarations. For instance, in his letter Wisbey affirmed, “‘Naturalistic evolution’ is a phrase that either in code or direct definition implies a perspective of ‘atheistic evolution.’ We reject this implied atheistic charge.”<sup>69</sup> Note, however, that Wisbey never denied the possibility that

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<sup>66</sup> Don C. Schneider Pastors Jan Paulsen, Ricardo Graham, by David Asscherick, April 30, 2009, Pastors Jan Paulsen, Don C. Schneider, Ricardo Graham: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, EducateTruth.com. Silver Spring, MD.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> La Sierra University Board of Trustees, La Sierra University Faculty & Staff, and La Sierra University Church Leadership Team, by Randal Wisbey, May 18, 2009, President Randal Wisbey’s Response, EducateTruth.com. Riverside, CA.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

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members of the faculty of the Biology Department at LSU might believe or accept “theistic evolution.”

On November 11, 2009, the La Sierra University board of trustees released a statement of support for the Adventist view of Creation, which read:

The Board of Trustees is fully mindful of La Sierra University’s responsibilities and commitments as a Seventh-day Adventist institution of higher education. This includes whole-hearted support for the doctrines and teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as defined by the 28 Statements of Fundamental Beliefs, specifically fundamental belief #6.<sup>70</sup>

Fritz Guy has openly declared that the statement on Creation was worded broadly in order to account for those individuals who do not believe in a recent, literal Creation over six consecutive twenty-four-hour days. Given that, how much of the LSU board of trustees’ statement of support is meant to agree with the position of mainline Seventh-day Adventists? This question seems to portray the concerns of other members and Seventh-day organizations as concerns that would produce unexpected reactions.

**From Substantial Response to Unexpected Action**

After the initial letter was sent to the General Conference president on March 16, 2009, many presented their opinions regarding the issue at LSU.<sup>71</sup> Three actions by those working to find a solution to the issue and restore the integrity of Seventh-day Adventist education at LSU must be mentioned here.

**Jan Paulsen’s Appeal**

The appearance of Jan Paulsen’s “An Appeal” on Adventist News Network on June 19, 2009 was an important action by the church organizational body. Paulsen, who was serving his second term as president of the General Conference, released this significant appeal expanding on the meaning of Fundamental Belief #6. He referred to the statement “A Reaffirmation of

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<sup>70</sup> La Sierra University Board of Trustees, *Statement of Support for the Adventist View of Creation*, ed. Larry Becker (Riverside, CA: EducatedTruth.com, 2009).

<sup>71</sup> Hilde Shane has documented the ongoing discussion at LSU with significant accuracy. For additional information see: Shane Hilde, “The History,” EducateTruth.com <http://www.educatetruth.com/the-history/> (accessed October 04, 2010).

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Creation,” voted on by the General Conference Executive Committee at the 2004 Annual Council, and placed emphasis on various important aspects of that document. He quoted, “We strongly endorse the document’s affirmation of our historic, biblical position of belief in a literal, recent, six-day Creation,” and added, “We reaffirm the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the historicity of Genesis 1-11: 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; and that the Flood was global in nature.”<sup>72</sup> In his final remarks, Paulsen said, “I appeal to you that when you take your students out on the journey, you bring them safely back home before the day is over. And their home must always be in the world of faith.”<sup>73</sup> The church as an organization had taken its first significant action toward solving the ongoing issue at LSU.

**A Conference Response**

Another substantial response to LSU was the resolution made by the Michigan Conference Executive Committee on May 25, 2010:

Whereas, the *Adventist Review* (in the article by Mark Kellner in April 15, 2010) has now publicly addressed the issue of evolution being taught at and supported by La Sierra University; and, whereas their board of trustees and constituency have collectively been unwilling to rectify this vital spiritual issue, the Michigan Conference Executive Committee has voted the following actions:

1. Effective June 1, 2010 the Michigan Conference has removed La Sierra University from its list of Adventist Colleges and Universities which qualify for employee subsidy. This means that no employee may expect tuition support if they have a dependent attending La Sierra.
2. With sorrow we feel it is our spiritual responsibility to notify Michigan Conference members that we do not believe that La Sierra can currently be trusted to be supportive of Seventh-day Adventist spiritual values

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<sup>72</sup>Jan Paulsen, “An Appeal,” (2009). <http://news.adventist.org/statements/an-appeal.html> (accessed October 05, 2010).

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

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especially in reference to faith in the biblical understanding of Creation, and thus the authority of Scripture in the life and practice of the believer.<sup>74</sup>

Although, some have reacted strongly against these actions, this response and appeal would not go unheard.

### **General Conference 2010 Positive Action**

Certainly unexpected by many was the motion brought to the floor by Dr. Ted N. C. Wilson, the newly elected president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. On the one hand, Wilson's motion was in part a response to various requests to clarify the Fundamental Belief #6 as requested by some voices in the International Faith & Science Conferences (2004), the Faith and Science Council, the Michigan and Northern California Conferences. On the other hand, his motion reflected his comprehensive vision for the church's mission and his life of service to the church.

Wilson's motion included a request to approve the statement "A Reaffirmation of Creation," which more clearly stated the Adventist understanding regarding origins, based on the interpretation of Genesis 1-11. In addition, his motion included a request that the General Conference Administration initiate the process of integration of Fundamental Belief #6 and the statement "A Reaffirmation of Creation."<sup>75</sup> The motion was enthusiastically carried and strongly supported.

In summary, it is not an overstatement to say that Wilson's motion voted on the floor of the General Conference in Atlanta, GA on June 30, 2010 is a remarkable development to be remembered in Seventh-day Adventist history as part of the great leap forward, leading us to a new reformation.

### **Conclusion**

As recorded in the annals of history, the doctrine of Creation has been enormously influenced by different lines of thinking, especially Greek philosophy, an influence that can be observed within the work of theologians

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<sup>74</sup> Michigan Conference Executive Committee, "Michigan Conference Takes Substantial Action in LSA Conflict," Michigan Conference <http://www.educatetruth.com/news/michigan-conference-takes-substantial-action-in-lsu-conflict/>.

<sup>75</sup> Keith Lockhart, "Under Wilson, Church Begins the Process to Rewrite Creation Belief," *Spectrum*, June 30, 2010.

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such as Philo of Alexandria, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and others. Consequentially, a great variety of approaches to the biblical Creation account of Genesis 1:1–2:3 have resulted from attempts to reconcile the Bible with the discoveries of science instead of submitting those discoveries to Scripture. Similarly the Age of Enlightenment brought many challenges to the interpretation of Scripture, with its emphasis on reason and the empirical method. One reaction in favor of a conservative interpretation of Scripture was a movement known as Fundamentalism, which came to America accompanied by evangelicalism. The former opposed the Enlightenment drastically, while the latter tended to accommodate it, providing an adequate environment for a multiplicity of approaches to the doctrine of Creation—something that should be avoided by Seventh-day Adventists.

It is a difficult task to cover in only a few pages all the implications of the abandonment of the theological concept of *Sola Scriptura* for the biblical account of Creation; as in matter of fact, this is not my primary purpose. Nevertheless, it must be emphasized that from my perspective, if such was not explored in light of the Great Controversy theme, it would hardly make any difference for those claiming to be followers of God, but that is not the case in this research paper.

Thus, in light of the Great Controversy theme, it seems plausible to suggest that God's response to these events was the providential rise of the movement that became the Seventh-day Adventist Church (Daniel 7, 8, 9; Rev 14:6-12). Interestingly, besides providing guidance through the writings of Ellen G. White, God has also impressed others to stand up in defense of the biblical account of Creation and the worldwide Flood. One such writer was George McCready Price, whose theological views firmly rested upon the literal truth and historicity of the Bible and its original text.

Seventh-day Adventists believe they have been chosen by God to lift up the truth of the Bible as his historical narrative of Creation, judgment, and salvation. Thus, the church's understanding of Scripture has continued to grow since 1854, and its doctrinal statements have improved accordingly. In exploring these improvements, I find it odd that the Seventh-day Adventist Church did not release a statement on Creation until 1980, despite all the work done by theologians such as George McCready Price, the founder of scientific recent Creation studies. Thus, although in the early years of the Adventist movement, the Seventh-day Adventists did not establish a specific statement on Creation, the concept of Creation was always implicit in their fundamental principles, either

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by their acceptance of God's attributes—Creator, or their recognition of the validity of the fourth commandment—the Sabbath.

Adventists believe that just as the undesirable powers of evil are constantly working to confuse and distract the human race, God is actively and constantly working to execute his plan of redemption. By allowing his servants to establish the differences between Godlike institutions and more manlike ones, God led the Seventh-day Adventist Church to seek a public and explicit position on origins.

Much hard work was put into the formulation of a statement on Creation that would testify accurately to the Seventh-day Adventists' high regard for the Bible. The statement initially produced by the X-1535 Ad Hoc Committee was a true attempt to preserve God's landmarks as suggested by W. J. Hackett. Despite the need for minor editorial work, it clearly represented the belief of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. However, the Fundamental Belief #6 voted during the 1980 General Conference session in Dallas, TX, because of its intended ambiguity as shown in this paper, has led to over thirty years of uncertainty of the meaning of Creation in our educational institutions. This current reality indicates that the uncertainty should not continue.

As mentioned earlier, the three landmarks present in the three-column document are as follows: (1) The word "literal" is used to describe the six days of Creation. (2) The term "chronicle" is employed to mean a historical account of Creation. Thus, the use of "chronicle" implies the historicity of the Genesis account, which is in accordance with the Adventist position on Creation. (3) The concept of a "world-wide flood" is used to describe the results of a Creation that was marred by sin.<sup>76</sup>

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of the rewritten statement voted on at the April 25, 1980 General Conference session. First, this statement lacks specificity regarding the nature of the source of the account: is the source historical or not? Second, the words "the heaven and the earth" appear between quotes, leaving the biblical statement open to allegorical interpretation. Third, the statement ignores the Hebrew text by not clarifying whether the "days" (יָמִים) described in Genesis 1:1–2:3 are literal twenty-four-hour days or represent long periods of time. Fourth, it gives no indication of acceptance of the Garden of Eden as a historical place, or the belief that the worldwide Flood is a historical

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

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event.<sup>77</sup> This assessment suggests that the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of Creation, existing since the Adventist pioneers, has been severely compromised.<sup>78</sup>

In light of this assessment, it seems imperative to the survival of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as God's reformation movement in the last days that a new statement on Creation be prepared and approved by the General Conference as soon as possible. The new statement must clearly express the mainline Seventh-day Adventist understanding of origins without leaving room for pluralistic interpretations.

In conclusion and in my opinion it would be appropriate for the Seventh-day Adventist Church to do the following:

1) Stand upon the theological concept of *Sola, Tota, and Prima Scriptura* and the conviction that the Bible is the revelation of God to humanity, containing "the only inspired, reliable chronicle of the Creation of the world."

2) Respond kindly and winsomely to those accusing mainline Adventists of using a "misguided Baconianism toward the Bible."<sup>79</sup> While we should humbly admit that not all of the Bible's content can be understood through empirical method, we can remind those who question the validity of the Bible that mega evolution also cannot be demonstrated by the same principles of empiricism.

It could be objected that theology and science cannot work together due to their incompatibilities. Nevertheless, while these fields serve different purposes, it is a matter of choice which field should govern the other. Thus, if science would consider the Bible to work as the starting point in matters of origins, both science and theology would have much to gain.

3) Proceed prayerfully in rewording the Fundamental Belief #6. Since the first positive action has already been taken, the administration must go forward

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<sup>77</sup> Additional information on the meaning of the Hebrew word *בְּרֵאשִׁית* see R. Laird Harris, Gleason Leonard Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, electronic ed., 2 vols. (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980), 370.

<sup>78</sup> For a clearer understanding of Seventh-day Adventists position on Creation see "An Affirmation of Creation: Report of the Organizing Committee of the International Faith and Science Conference," *Ministry Magazine*, March 2005, 19-21. For information on the floor discussion on the GC session see General Conference Bulletin No. 6, "Ninth Business Meeting: Fifty-third General Conference Session, April 22, 1980, 3:15 P.M. Session Proceedings," *Review and Herald*, April 24.

<sup>79</sup> Noll, 198-199.

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without losing focus on the Great Controversy, for this is the key to understanding Seventh-day Adventist theology.

Seventh-day Adventists must press forward, always remembering that “The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall.”<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Ellen G. White, *Education* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 1903), 57.