

## EVOLUTION, THEOLOGY, AND METHOD, PART 3: EVOLUTION AND ADVENTIST THEOLOGY

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### *Introduction*

The analysis of scientific methodology and its application in the construction of evolutionary theory has shown its epistemological limitations.<sup>1</sup> When theologians understand evolution as a “fact” to which Christian theology should accommodate, they are not responding to an unshakable certainty produced by reason or method, but to the consensus of the scientific community and the conviction of contemporary culture.

The purpose of this final article in a series of three is to explore the relationship between theological method and evolutionary theory in Adventist theology. Understanding the role of theological method in the generation and construction of theological thinking may help to illuminate the conditions and implications involved in rejecting evolution or accommodating Adventist doctrines to it. The study of theological methodology is a broad and complex field of studies. As in the first two articles of this series, I will deal with theological methodology only as it is directly concerned with the relation between creation and evolution. I will approach the broad issues of theological methodology by first briefly introducing the notion of “theological method” and the “scientific” status of theology. Then, I will explore the theology-science relation. Third, the way in which Christian theologies relate to evolutionary theology will be considered. Once these background issues have been reviewed, I will examine the question of theological method in Adventism, the way in which Adventist theology relates to evolutionary theory, and, finally, some tasks that Adventist thinkers must perform as they consider whether to accommodate theology to evolutionary theory.

### *Method as a Presupposition of the Creation-Evolution Debate*

The creation-evolution conflict of interpretations is generally thought of in terms of faith and science or faith and reason. Although these approaches are important, they are misleading because they suggest that the generation of the content of faith does not involve reason or

<sup>1</sup>See Fernando Canale, “Evolution, Theology, and Method, Part 1: Outline and Limits of Scientific Methodology,” *AUSS* 41 (2003): 65-100; and idem, “Evolution, Theology, and Method, Part 2: Scientific Method and Evolution,” *AUSS* 41 (2003):165-184.

scientific method.<sup>2</sup> In reality, the conflict between evolution and creation arises when theological methodology defines its material condition from the *sola Scriptura* principle. As theological “science,”<sup>3</sup> Adventist theology results from the use of human reason and theological methodology.

Though Adventist theology has developed more in the area of biblical studies than in the areas of fundamental and systematic theologies, it assumes strong positions in all these areas. Systematics studies the inner logic or coherence of the entire body of teachings of the church. To accomplish this task, it builds on biblical interpretations of the material, teleological, hermeneutical, and methodological principles. On this basis, systematic theologians pursue the logical connections of biblical thought, as opposed to the textual connections followed by biblical theologians. Thus, the doctrine of creation begins as a detailed exegesis of all biblical data related to the creation of the world, but then proceeds to demonstrate that creation is a divine action involving a divine pattern and purpose. Therefore, systematic theologians explore the understanding of creation not only in faithfulness to the biblical texts, but also by factoring in what is logically assumed in the issue, event, or reality that the doctrine explains. Creation is explored as divine activity (which requires a precise preunderstanding of divine nature and activity) and as what results from that activity (general knowledge of the world).

Because of this methodological and disciplinary basis, the conflict between evolution and creation should not be conceived as a conflict between a scientific theory and the Gen 1-2 accounts of creation, but as a conflict between the results of carefully defined empirical and theological methodologies. If the conflict were only between the Genesis accounts of creation and the theory of evolution, the Genesis accounts could not stand the intellectual weight and complexity of evolutionary methodology and theory. Yet, the Christian doctrine of creation is only one part of a larger

<sup>2</sup>Richard Rice, for instance, defines faith as “a voluntary act of complete trust in God which affirms, among other things, his existence and love in response to evidence that is helpful but not conclusive” (*Reason and the Contours of Faith* [Riverside, CA: La Sierra University Press, 1991], 29). To many, however, the contents of faith do not involve “a claim to know something” (*ibid*, 19). For them, the contents of faith do not originate through reason or method, but through imagination. Evidence, though never conclusive, may help believers in affirming their faith. Apparently, this way of thinking does not involve method in forming the contents of faith. Nonetheless, all definitions of faith, biblical and otherwise, arise from explicit or implicit concrete methodological principles.

<sup>3</sup>The term “science” has a variety of meanings. Though most associate the term with the empirical or so-called “hard” sciences, there are also the human or so-called “softer” sciences. In a broader sense, then, the term “science” applies to all methodically construed research activity. In fact, theology is “scientific” as far as it involves a plurality of scholarly disciplines. For an introduction on the many meanings and uses of the word “science,” see Alister E. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology: Nature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 1:25-26.

theological complex. Its intelligibility does not stand on one isolated text, but on the explanatory power of theological method and the inner logic of the entire sweep of biblical revelation.

In this conflict, reason, methodology, and interpretation are involved and omnipresent. Yet, reason can produce only interpretations, not absolute truth. Interpretation takes place because reason and method always lean on assumptions. Reason can produce at least two or more interpretations on any given issue or doctrine, which is why there are various views about reason, methodology, and interpretation. The competing views of creationism and evolutionism on the question of origins flow from the hypothetical nature of reason and method.<sup>4</sup>

Adventists seeking to harmonize evolution with Christian beliefs generally attempt to relate evolutionary metanarrative to biblical narrative (Gen 1-2). Not surprisingly, some have suggested that the two metanarratives be blended into one, at least as a temporary measure until there is more time to consider the evidence.<sup>5</sup> However, this approach, which at first seems the logical thing to do, ignores the fact that any harmonization between creation and evolution involves more than harmonizing a theory with Gen 1-2.

The harmonization between evolution and biblical creation involves two different methodologies and theoretical explanations. Failing to recognize that the doctrine of creation stands on a complex theological methodology in which it plays a leading hermeneutical role, and that creation is an inextricable component of the inner logic of biblical thinking, leads to the illusion that harmonization only requires the replacement of the obvious historical meaning of the Genesis account with a “theological” interpretation.<sup>6</sup>

### *Theological Method*

Most scientists have a difficult time accepting theology as a science. Yet, some theologians think of their trade as scientific in a rational, as opposed to an experiential, sense. For example, Thomas Aquinas

<sup>4</sup>Creationism is not only the result of biblical exegesis, but also a possible conclusion of human reason, e.g., Plato thought of creation as a possible explanation of the origin of the world on rational rather than revelational grounds (*Tim.*, 27, e-29).

<sup>5</sup>See, e.g., Jack W. Provonsha, “The Creation/Evolution Debate in the Light of the Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan,” in *Creation Reconsidered: Scientific, Biblical, and Theological Perspectives*, ed. James L. Hayward (Roseville, CA: Association of Adventist Forums, 2000), 310-311.

<sup>6</sup>Such is Fritz Guy’s proposal, which runs against the clear literal-historical meaning of the Gen 1-2 account of creation, but fits the concrete methodological principles implicit in Guy’s theological interpretation (“Interpreting Genesis One in the Twenty-first Century,” *Spectrum* 31/2 (2003): 5-16). For an introduction to the historical meaning of Gen 1-2, consider Richard M. Davidson, “The Biblical Account of Origins,” *JATS* 14 (2003): 4-43.

declared: "*Sacra doctrina* is a science,"<sup>7</sup> while in the twentieth century Thomas Torrance renewed the claim that theology is a science.<sup>8</sup> While most theologians do not generally refer to their trade as "scientific" per se,<sup>9</sup> they do, however, speak about theological method. As in the case of the so-called "hard" sciences, the scientific status of theology corresponds closely to the formal structure of the scientific method considered in the first article of this series. The scientific or scholarly nature of theology also relates closely to theological method.

With the increasing need for scientific verification, it is not surprising that Christian theologians representing a broad spectrum of traditions have recently approached the issue of theological method. Among the more influential contributors to the current debate on theological method are John Macquarrie (1966),<sup>10</sup> Thomas F. Torrance (1969),<sup>11</sup> René Latourelle (1969),<sup>12</sup> José Miguez Bonino (1975),<sup>13</sup> Gerhard Ebeling (1975),<sup>14</sup> Gordon D. Kaufman (1975),<sup>15</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg (1976),<sup>16</sup> Bernard Lonergan (1979),<sup>17</sup> Frederick E. Crowe (1980),<sup>18</sup> Randy L. Maddox (1984),<sup>19</sup> Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (1987),<sup>20</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Thomas Aquinas, *SThe* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), Ia. 1, 2.

<sup>8</sup>The title of Thomas F. Torrance's *Theological Science* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969) clearly expresses that conviction.

<sup>9</sup>For theologians associating the term "science" with "theology," it is important to bear in mind Wolfhart Pannenberg's warning that "science" is "a term with its own multitude of meanings" (*Metaphysics and the Idea of God*, trans. Philip Clayton [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988], 130).

<sup>10</sup>John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, 2d ed. (New York: Scribner, 1966).

<sup>11</sup>Torrance.

<sup>12</sup>René Latourelle, *Theology: Science of Salvation*, trans. Mary Dominic (Staten Island: Alba, 1969); and also René Latourelle and Gerald O'Collins, eds., *Problems and Perspectives of Fundamental Theology* (New York: Paulist, 1982).

<sup>13</sup>José Miguez Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975).

<sup>14</sup>Gerhard Ebeling, *The Study of Theology*, trans. Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975).

<sup>15</sup>Gordon D. Kaufman, *An Essay on Theological Method* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975).

<sup>16</sup>Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, trans. Francis McDonagh (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976).

<sup>17</sup>Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1979).

<sup>18</sup>Frederick E. Crowe, *Method in Theology: An Organon for Our Time* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980).

<sup>19</sup>Randy L. Maddox, *Toward an Ecumenical Fundamental Theology* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984).

<sup>20</sup>Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, trans. Mary Frances McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1987).

David Tracy (1988),<sup>21</sup> Avery Dulles (1992),<sup>22</sup> Richard Lints,<sup>23</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer,<sup>24</sup> and other evangelical theologians (1991).<sup>25</sup> A review of these and other writings on theological method reveal that what theologians mean by theological method varies greatly between traditions, schools of theologies, and individual theologians. These variations seem to take place because theologians usually address method theologically (materially) rather than epistemologically (formally), i.e., they explain what they do in their theological constructions rather than describe the components, operations, procedures, assumptions, and goals of their activities without reference to the actual subject matter of their investigations.<sup>26</sup>

When considered epistemologically, however, the rationality and formal structure of theological and scientific method are the same.<sup>27</sup> As with scientific method, theological method is a means by which specific goals are achieved.<sup>28</sup> Bernard Lonergan correctly describes method as “a normative pattern of recurrent and related operations yielding cumulative and progressive results.”<sup>29</sup> Thus, in a technical sense, method is a set of

<sup>21</sup>David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988); and idem, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1991).

<sup>22</sup>Avery Dulles, *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System* (New York: Crossroad, 1992).

<sup>23</sup>Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993).

<sup>24</sup>Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *God, Scripture, and Hermeneutics: First Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002).

<sup>25</sup>See, e.g., John D. Woodbridge and Thomas Edward McComiskey, eds., *Doing Theology in Today's World: Essays in Honor of Kenneth S. Kantzer* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991).

<sup>26</sup>This situation comes to view in the generation of the historical-critical method. Exegetes created the method on the go. Epistemological explanations of the method are few. Examples of a growing epistemological analysis of the method include Steven MacKenzie and Stephen Haynes, eds., *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application* (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1999); and the ongoing work of Christian philosopher Raúl Kerbs, “El método histórico-crítico en teología: En busca de su estructura básica y de las interpretaciones filosóficas subyacentes (Parte I),” *DavarLogos* 1/2 (2002): 105-123; and idem, “El método histórico-crítico en teología: en busca de su estructura básica y de las interpretaciones filosóficas subyacentes (Parte II),” *DavarLogos* 2/1 (2003), 1-27.

<sup>27</sup>For an introduction to the formal description of theological method, see Kwabena Donkor, *Tradition, Method, and Contemporary Protestant Theology: An Analysis of Thomas C. Oden's Vincentian Method* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2003), 45-60.

<sup>28</sup>Canale, “Evolution, Theology and Method, Part I,” 70-71.

<sup>29</sup>Lonergan, 5. He, 4, further explains that “there is method, then, where there are distinct operations, where each operation is related to the others, where the set of relations forms a pattern, where the pattern is described as the right way of doing the job, where operations in accord with the pattern may be repeated indefinitely, and where

procedures or rules prescribed for the purpose of facilitating the achievement of a goal.<sup>30</sup> In addition to the teleological condition, from which method receives its goals, there are other conditions that regulate methodological activities, procedures, and operations: the material condition, or data (i.e., the information about God required to spark issues that require explanation, produce interpretation, and construct theological explanations) and the hermeneutical condition (i.e., principles that guide theological interpretation and construction).

In theology, hermeneutical presuppositions consist of the principles of reality (i.e., the interpretation of the reality of God, human beings, and the world as studied with the tools of ontology, philosophical anthropology, and cosmology), articulation (i.e., the interpretation of reality as a whole and the way in which the parts connect with one another as studied with the tools of metaphysics<sup>31</sup>), and knowledge (i.e., the interpretation of the origin of theological knowledge [the understanding of revelation-inspiration] and the interpretation of human knowledge).

Thus, the goals of method function as the teleological condition, the data serves as the material condition, and the ideas that are assumed function as the hermeneutical condition. The conditions, working closely together, shape the concrete profiles of theological and scientific methods.<sup>32</sup>

As the formal (i.e., epistemological) features of scientific methodology are applied to a plurality of empirical sciences (e.g., physics, biology, geology, paleontology, and zoology), theologians apply the formal (i.e., epistemological) features of theological methodology to a plurality of theological disciplines (e.g., exegesis, systematic theology, and practical theology). Each theological discipline appropriates the formal characteristics of theological methodology by adapting them to the task of achieving the specific object of study that justifies its existence. Thus, there is no single theological method that is applicable to all disciplines. Rather, each discipline develops its own methodology

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the fruits of such repetition are not repetitious, but cumulative and progressive." Consequently, Lonergan, 6-25, organizes his discourse on method as an identification and explanation of the operations involved in the task of doing theology. Macquarrie, 33, agrees with Lonergan's definition of method, but goes on to apply it in a different way to the task of theology.

<sup>30</sup>René Descartes explained that "by method I mean certain and simple rules, such that, if a man observe them accurately, he shall never assume what is false as true, and will never spend his mental efforts to no purpose, but will always gradually increase his knowledge and so arrive at a true understanding of all that does not surpass his powers" ("Rules for the Direction of the Mind," in *Great Books of the Western World*, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins [Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952], 5).

<sup>31</sup>On the metaphysical designation of the whole versus the part, see Aristotle, *Metaph.* V.26; 1023b, 26-102a, 10; and Pannenberg, *Metaphysics and the Idea of God*, 139-152.

<sup>32</sup>For further clarification on the conditions of theological method, see Fernando Canale, "Interdisciplinary Method in Christian Theology? In Search of a Working Proposal," *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 43/3 (2001): 371-375.

in light of its specific objective (i.e., teleological principle). In order for the various theological disciplines to interact harmoniously with one another, they must share the same understanding of the hermeneutical (i.e., interpretational) and material (i.e., source of theology) principles of their particular methods. The disciplinary division of theological studies and the specific methodologies within each discipline requires an overarching interdisciplinary methodology through which all disciplines communicate, complement, and correct one another as each discipline contributes to the achievement of the final objective of theology.<sup>33</sup>

The difference between scientific and theological methodologies appears at the material level, i.e., when scientists and theologians give concrete content to the conditions and activities of method. Scientific methodology has nature as its intended formal object or cognitive goal, while theological methodology has God as its intended formal object or cognitive goal.<sup>34</sup> These goals, in turn, require different sources of data. Due to its object of study, scientific method works from empirical data. Christian theology, on the other hand, works from data believed to be supernaturally revealed. Scientists tend to agree among themselves as to the concrete content of the teleological and material conditions of scientific methodology and thus accept general patterns of empirical scientific methodology. Theologians, however, do not agree upon a universal method. The reason for this foundational disagreement may be found in the various ways in which different schools of theology define the material, teleological, and hermeneutical conditions of theological method.

### *Method in Theology*

To understand the evolution-creation debate and the theological attempts to harmonize the biblical doctrine of creation to evolutionary theory requires the consideration of the main contours of Adventist and other Christian theological methodologies. I will use the “model” method of presentation,<sup>35</sup> i.e., I will attempt to summarize a few important characteristics of a very complex subject matter (i.e., method in Christian theology) in order to maximize communication, show the role that theological method plays in approaches that either reject

<sup>33</sup>For the “final objective of theology,” see below on the teleological condition of method.

<sup>34</sup>It was not by chance that Aquinas, I, 1, 1, began his *SThe* by distinguishing between philosophical and theological sciences on account of their respective objects of study (i.e., teleological condition of method).

<sup>35</sup>David Tracy explains: “A widely accepted dictum in contemporary theology is the need to develop certain basic models or types for understanding the specific task of the contemporary theologian” (*Blessed Rage for Order*, 22). For further discussion of models, see Frederick Ferré, *Language, Logic and God* (New York: Harper, 1961); Ian Ramsey, *Models and Mystery* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964); and idem, *Christian Discourse* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965).

harmonization or that attempt harmonization of biblical creation with evolutionary theory, and, finally, to open the dialogue on this weighty issue. As I contrast Adventist theological methodology with other Christian methodologies, I will describe in explicit terms what, in Adventist theology so far, takes place mostly implicitly. In addition, while I will highlight some broad assumptions of Christian theological methodology, I will be dealing primarily with the classical (i.e., Roman Catholic and Protestant) model of theology with some references to modern theological methodology.<sup>36</sup>

The existence of Adventist doctrines assumes the existence of a theological method. However, Adventist theologians generally do not explain explicitly the methodology assumed in their interpretations and teachings. Further, Adventism has, so far, neglected the epistemological study and definition of theological methodology.<sup>37</sup> For this reason, I cannot build my analysis in this section from studies on this issue. I will rely in this section, then, on the occasional writers who have addressed the issues involved in theological methodology and in the methodologies implicitly assumed by current trends in Adventist thought.<sup>38</sup> This description will only

<sup>36</sup>For the purpose of this article, this brief treatment will suffice. I plan to study classical, evangelical, and modern models of theological methodologies in greater depth in a future study. Though there are some substantial differences between the classical and modern theological methodologies, their commonalities lead to similar results concerning the creation-evolution controversy we are focusing on in this series of articles.

<sup>37</sup>Adventists have been mostly concerned about biblical interpretation. For decades, their understanding of method revolved around exegetical methodology and familiarity with the principles of biblical interpretation. Representatives of this approach are Gordon Hyde, ed., *A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics* (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Committee, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1974); and Gerhard F. Hasel, *Biblical Interpretation Today* (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1985). In a series of articles published after his death, Gerhard F. Hasel went beyond exegetical methodology and principles of biblical interpretation to consider the disciplinary matrix of biblical theology as a scholarly discipline ("The Nature of Biblical Theology: Recent Trends and Issues," *AUSS* 32 (1994): 203-215; "Recent Models of Biblical Theology: Three Major Perspectives," *AUSS* 33 (1995): 55-75; and "Proposals for a Canonical Biblical Theology," *AUSS* 34 (1996): 23-33. Frank Hasel gave preliminary thought to the relation between systematic and biblical theologies in "Algunas Reflexiones sobre la relación entre la teología sistemática y la teología bíblica," *Theologica* 11 (1996): 105-123.

<sup>38</sup>Fritz Guy's *Thinking Theologically: Adventist Christianity and the Interpretation of Faith* extended the discussion on method to the area of theological studies. He explicitly states: "This book is an essay in theological methodology, which is one component of metatheology. It is an attempt to identify and explain important characteristics of Adventist theology (along with much of the theology of the larger Christian community), and to propose basic principles to guide this activity" ([Andrews University Press, 1999], 8). Guy, viii-ix, not only tells us that Adventist methodology is not unique, but that it should follow closely "much of the theology of the larger Christian community," (ibid., 8) notably, the modern pattern of theological method (ibid., 10). The modernistic pattern of Guy's, 10, theological methodology comes clearly into view when he states: "As the interpretation of faith, thinking theologically is thinking as carefully, comprehensively, and creatively as possible about the content, adequacy, and implication of one's own religious life." Guy's modernistic approach to theological

attempt to identify trends without analyzing them or discussing their overall consequences for Adventist theology or, more specifically, the issue of creation versus evolution.

Classical and modern theologians have reflected at some length on the theological methods their traditions use. While I am aware of these studies, my description of classical theological methodology will also take into account what exemplary theologians actually do methodologically, a necessary step to clarify positions about the material, teleological, and hermeneutical conditions of method that studies in method may not have yet explicitly included.

Thus, theological method builds on the material, hermeneutical, and teleological conditions that shape its essence and procedures. We will now briefly consider the way in which classical and Adventist theologies deal with the conditions of method in the hope that this may help to explain why some Adventists consider harmonization between Adventist beliefs and the theory of evolution as being possible, while others do not.

### The Material Condition

Various interpretations of the sources of theology and the inspiration and revelation of Scripture continue to generate divergent views on the material condition of theological methodology. In turn, this diversity of opinion on the identification and nature of theological sources produces different schools of theology that generate various traditions and communities.

Classical and modern theologies adopt a multiplicity of theological sources from which theological data originates. In spite of holding a high view of Scripture and inheriting the Reformation *sola Scriptura* principle,<sup>39</sup> most evangelical theologians subscribe to multiple sources of theology. In theory, they minimize the role of extrabiblical sources as “small,”<sup>40</sup> “utilitarian,”<sup>41</sup> or “eclectic.”<sup>42</sup> In practice, however, whether

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methodology explains why he can suggest harmonizing evolutionary theory and biblical creation by way of a “theological” interpretation of Gen 1 (“Interpreting Genesis One in the Twenty-first Century,” 5-16). Recently, Donkor studied the formal structure of theological method and the role that tradition plays in the consensual methodology of Thomas Oden in his *Tradition, Method, and Contemporary Protestant Theology*. Donkor, 169, criticizes Oden’s tradition-based methodology because it tends to subsume Scripture within the tradition category, something similar to what Guy seems to do in his definition of the theological thinking as reflection on religious experience.

<sup>39</sup>For an introduction to the discussion of the role of Scripture in the Reformation and Protestant Orthodoxy, see Frank Hasel, *Scripture in the Theologies of W. Pannenberg and D. G. Bloesch: An Investigation and Assessment of Its Origin, Nature, and Use*, Europäische Hochschulschriften, 555 (New York: P. Lang, 1996). 31-61.

<sup>40</sup>Analyzing the role of natural theology (i.e., philosophical and scientific reflection on God) in Christian theology, Rice, 201, concludes that “there is validity in the time-honored distinction between the truths of reason and the truths of revelation, and the relative content of natural theology will be *considerably smaller in scope* than that of revealed theology” (emphasis supplied).

<sup>41</sup>Donald G. Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit: Authority and Method in Theology*,

explicitly or implicitly, theologians use philosophical (i.e., ontological, metaphysical, and epistemological) and scientific (i.e., cosmological) sources to shape the hermeneutical principles of their theological method. In so doing, philosophy and science become the guiding lights that theologians follow in their interpretations and systematic construction of Christian doctrines. This approach lies at the foundation of the Roman Catholic theological method and, in a less overt fashion, is still operative in Protestant theological methodology.

Among the sources from which Catholic and Protestant theologians draw theological data are Scripture, tradition, reason, philosophy, science, culture, and experience.<sup>43</sup> Theologians consider that all these sources are, in one way or another, products of divine revelation.<sup>44</sup>

In regard to Adventist theology, there are two competing views on the source of Christian theology. While some hold to the traditional *sola Scriptura* view, others hold to the notion of *prima Scriptura*.<sup>45</sup> The *sola*

Christian Foundations (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992), 1: 49.

<sup>42</sup>Millard Erickson explains that he will use philosophy as a multiple source for theology, but will not commit to any system of philosophy (*Christian Theology*, 2d ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998], 53).

<sup>43</sup>Different traditions configure these sources in different ways and understand their interrelationship in different ways. This diversity in understanding the multiplicity-of-sources pattern further fragments the way in which different schools of theology concretely interpret the conditions of theological methodology, e.g., Tracy thinks that the material condition of theological method must include two principal sources, "Christian texts and common human experience and language" (*Blessed Rage for Order*, 43). More specifically, "the Christian faith in its several expressions and contemporary experience in its several cultural expressions" (ibid., 45). Hans Küng, similarly speaks of "two constants, poles, or horizons for a critical ecumenical theology," which are: first, "our present-day experience with all its ambivalence, contingency, and changeableness;" and second, "the Jewish-Christian tradition" (*Theology for the Third Millennium*, trans. Peter Heinegg [New York: Doubleday, 1988], 166, 168). Many modern and postmodern theologians accept this view as a self-evident axiom. See also Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 1:119-257.

<sup>44</sup>For instance, according to Avery Dulles, 103: "Tradition is 'divine' insofar as it is aroused and sustained by God." Yet, we should be aware that the divine tradition includes the teachings of classical metaphysical principles. Thus, Dulles, 133, explains that as Roman Catholicism interacts with increasingly diverse philosophical trends, "the successful insights of the classical tradition must survive, or at least be subsumed in some recognizable form, in any future system. Historically, and I think providentially, Catholic faith has been linked with the metaphysical realism of classical thought, and has refined that realism in the venerable philosophical tradition."

<sup>45</sup>In *Thinking Theologically*, Guy departs from the *sola Scriptura* principle of the Protestant Reformation, which the first Fundamental Belief of Seventh-day Adventism clearly states, and replaces it with a plurality of sources and the *prima Scriptura* principle. Guy, 120, thinks that "the formal statement, 'Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists,' describes itself as a formulation of 'the church's understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture,' which is 'the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested.' While this statement is necessarily an oversimplification, ignoring both the presence of other ingredients in the community's theological thinking and the complexity of the relationship between scripture and experience, it appropriately

*Scriptura* view maintains that Scripture alone can provide theological data. The *prima Scriptura* conviction maintains that Adventist theology should build its doctrines upon a plurality of sources, among which Scripture has the primary or normative role. Evangelical circles identify this plurality of sources as the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. Roman Catholic theology also accepts a plurality of theological sources. On one hand, it is not difficult to see that when Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience are accepted as valid sources of theological data, any change in scientific or philosophical teachings becomes a change in theological data that might require changes in the hermeneutical conditions of theology. On the other hand, it is also easy to see that when Scripture alone is the source of revealed theological data, changes in science or philosophy will not alter theological reflection or understanding at the level of methodological conditions. Science and tradition are resources adjusted to the intelligibility and conditions dictated by the source of theology, namely, Scripture.<sup>46</sup> The difference between source and

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and emphatically affirms the pre-eminent place of scripture in an Adventist interpretation of faith." Thus, Guy rejects the "*sola Scriptura* principle" that the Seventh-day Adventist community officially affirms and replaces it with a plurality of sources, among which Scripture functions as "first." Guy fails to notice here, perhaps due the material condition his modernistic methodology endorses, that in Fundamental Belief 1, Adventists state: "The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments are the written Word of God given by divine inspiration," and, that they are "the infallible revelation of His will." Guy correctly perceives in this statement an "oversimplification" because other "ingredients" (i.e., sources of theology) are ignored. However, Guy forgets that the "oversimplification" is intentional, revealing a methodological decision made by the community. The community has chosen explicitly to build its theology based on the Bible and the Bible alone. Throughout her writings, Ellen White constantly reminds us of this methodological decision on which Adventism stands. Conversely, at the level of the grounding material condition of theological methodology, Guy's convictions clearly depart from the explicitly expressed "faith" of the Adventist community. On the *prima Scriptura* principle in Adventism, see also Woodrow W. Whidden, "*Sola Scriptura*, Inerrantist Fundamentalism and the Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Is 'No Creed but the Bible' a Workable Solution," *AUSS* 35 (1997): 211-226.

<sup>46</sup> Alister McGrath apparently subscribes to the *sola Scriptura* principle in his model for methodologically engaging tradition. He begins by stating his overall conviction: "I shall here suggest that one of the most fundamental distinctives of the evangelical approach to theology is its insistence that theology be nourished and governed at all points by Holy Scripture and that it seek to offer a faithful and coherent account of what it finds there" ("Engaging the Great Tradition: Evangelical Theology and the Role of Tradition," in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method*, ed. John G. Stackhouse Jr. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000], 139). In fact, however, he subscribes to the multiple sources of theology approach without distinguishing between revealed source, Scripture, and human-originated resources such as tradition, science, philosophy, and experience (see, e.g., 151). Yet, his strong advocacy of Scripture in dealing with the teachings of tradition stems from and leans toward the *sola Scriptura* principle. For instance, consider this statement: "It must be conceded that tradition includes mistakes. Well, what else can you expect? Theologians are human beings and hence prone to error. The important thing is to identify and correct these errors in the light of scripture itself" (ibid., 153). As far as I know, however, McGrath has not applied the primacy of Scripture to the contents of the hermeneutical condition of theology, the reality of God,

resource is that the former is generated by divine revelation, while the latter springs from human imagination. As resources originate in human understanding and imagination, they may contribute to theological discourse only after the *sola-tota-prima Scriptura* principle is applied.

The application of the *sola Scriptura* principle means that the hermeneutical condition of theological method, including the principles of divine, human, and world realities, is interpreted only from biblical thought. The *tota Scriptura* principle refers to the interpretation of all biblical contents and the inner logic from the biblically interpreted hermeneutical condition of theological method (*sola Scriptura*). The *prima Scriptura* principle refers to the fact that the hermeneutical principle, interpreted from scriptural thought (*sola Scriptura*) and the entire content of biblical thought (*tota Scriptura*), will guide theologians in critically selecting and incorporating from other sources (e.g., philosophy, science, experience) information as the teachings and inner logic of biblical thinking may require.

In Adventism, then, the material condition closely relates to the understanding of revelation-inspiration. Adventist theologians, however, also seem to be divided between the verbal,<sup>47</sup> thought,<sup>48</sup> and encounter<sup>49</sup>

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humans, and the cosmos. In his recent *Nature*, McGrath, 21, seems to follow the traditional pattern that surrenders to natural theology the task of interpreting the principle of reality. If this is correct, once again, the affirmation of a plurality of theological sources and even a strong affirmation of *prima Scriptura* will lead theologians to define their hermeneutical principles from their own reflections on nature and, in turn, explicitly or implicitly use them to interpret and construct their understanding of Christian theology.

<sup>47</sup>The verbal theory of inspiration sprang from the classical method of theology. Briefly put, the verbal theory of inspiration maximizes God's activity to the point of virtually obliterating human contributions in the origination of Scripture. The classical notion of divine sovereignty advanced by Augustine and continued by Luther, Calvin, and Protestant theology stands as the foundation of this theory of revelation-inspiration. For an introduction to and critique of the verbal model of inspiration, see Fernando Canale, *Back to Revelation-Inspiration: Searching for the Cognitive Foundations of Christian Theology in a Postmodern World* [Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2001], 75-88). For a historical description of the presence of this view in Adventist theology, see George Knight, *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Belief* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 128-159. This theory is also known as "plenary" inspiration (I. S. Rennie, "Plenary Inspiration," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984], 860-618; idem, "Verbal Inspiration," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 1242-1244; and Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970], 1:165). "Verbal" indicates opposition to the notion that only the prophets' thoughts rather than their words are inspired. Both "verbal" and "plenary" theories consider inspiration as divine assistance that renders the words of Scripture inerrant. Archibald Alexander clarifies that the "plenary" view of revelation-inspiration upholds the absolute inerrancy of Scripture (*Evidences of the Authenticity, Inspiration and Canonical Authority of the Holy Scriptures* [Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath-School Work, 1836], 223, 230).

<sup>48</sup>The notion of "thought inspiration" is primarily an Adventist phenomenon, which takes its inspiration from Ellen White's famous statement: "It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the

views of inspiration-revelation. Theologians who adhere to the “thought” or “encounter” theories of revelation-inspiration and to the Quadrilateral of sources will be more likely to contemplate a harmonization between the biblical doctrine of creation and the theory of evolution and to consider such a harmonization as a positive scientific advance that Adventist theology should recognize. Theologians who believe that the inspiration of Scripture reaches not only its thoughts but also its words<sup>50</sup> and who hold

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man’s words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God” (*Selected Messages* [Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958], 1:21). From this statement comes the theory that God’s activity only relates to and originates “thoughts,” but is not present to guide the prophet’s choice of words. The implication is that if God is not involved in the writing by choosing the words, then Scripture can contain errors. This notion has circulated within Adventism as an “antidote” to the encounter theory of inspiration (see Edward Heppenstall, “Doctrine of Revelation and Inspiration, Part 1,” *Ministry*, July 1970, 16-19; and idem, “Doctrine of Revelation and Inspiration [conclusion],” *Ministry*, August 1970, 28-31). The notion of thought inspiration has also been used as an antidote to problems arising from a strict application of the verbal-inspiration theory and its implicit corollary of total inerrancy (Juan Carlos Viera, *The Voice of the Spirit: How God Has Led His People Through the Gift of Prophecy* [Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1998], 81-82); and to open room for the use of the historical-critical method in Adventist exegesis (Alden Thompson, *Inspiration: Hard Questions, Honest Answers* [Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1991], 47, 53). Finally, some Adventists, convinced that evolutionary theory or deep time are unavoidable truths they cannot deny, use the notion of “thought” inspiration as a starting point for harmonizing evolutionary theory with biblical creation. See, e.g., Raymond F. Cottrell, “Inspiration and Authority of the Bible in Relation to Phenomena of the Natural World,” in *Creation Reconsidered: Scientific, Biblical, and Theological Perspectives*, ed. James L. Hayward (Roseville, CA: Association of Adventist Forums, 2000), 195-221; Frederick E. J. Harder, “Prophets: Infallible or Authoritative?” in *Creation Reconsidered*, 223-233; and idem, “Theological Dimensions of the Doctrine of Creation,” in *Creation Reconsidered*, 279-286. What these authors forget is that White’s overall view of inspiration and Scripture does include God in the generation of the words of Scripture. Ellen White argues against the way in which the classical doctrine of inspiration (i.e., verbal, plenary theory) interprets God’s operation in the origination of the thoughts and words of Scripture. God does not bypass human agency, but engages it in the generation of both the content and the words of Scripture (*The Great Controversy* [Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1950], v-vii).

<sup>49</sup>The encounter model of revelation-inspiration teaches that God encounters biblical writers personally rather than cognitively. According to this view, the bottom line is that God does not communicate information—either thoughts or words—to the prophets. Consequently, every word, thought, or other type of information communicated in Scripture originates in the imagination of human beings. See, for instance, Herold Weiss, “Revelation and the Bible: Beyond Verbal Inspiration,” *Spectrum* 7/3 (1975): 49-54. From this perspective, we should expect to find all sorts of philosophical, scientific, historical, and ethical errors in Scripture. It is not clear how many Adventist theologians work within this modernistic definition of the origin of Scripture. Obviously, those working from this perspective can consistently argue not only for harmonization between Scripture and science, but for plain scientific correction of biblical teachings.

<sup>50</sup>To affirm that divine inspiration reaches the words of Scripture, one does not

the *sola Scriptura* view will be more likely to reject the theory of evolution as being incompatible with Christian teachings. Thus, choices regarding the material condition of theological method clearly determine the coherence and viability of harmonizing biblical thought with scientific theories.

### The Teleological Condition

The teleological condition refers to the final and intermediate objectives theological methodology attempts to reach by way of its activities and procedures. Thus, there is an overall goal which theology proper seeks, specific disciplinary goals, and immediate goals for each research project or activity within the various theological disciplines (e.g., exegesis, systematic theology, practical theology, and church administration).

Determining the overall goal of theology also affects the decision whether to harmonize creation with evolution or deep time. For those following Augustine's lead,<sup>51</sup> the overall objective of theology is human understanding and relation to God, which generates little in regard to the conflict between theology and evolution. Instead, the classical understanding of the teleological condition of theological method calls for complementation between science and theology, preempting the need to harmonize them. Complementation becomes possible when theologians understand that scientific and theological methodologies have different teleological conditions. The objective of science is to understand nature; the objective of theology is to understand God. Thus, when considered at the methodological and disciplinarily level, there is a prearranged complementation between science and theology: theology studies God; science studies the world. As theologians and scientists study the question of origins, each has its own, different goal. While theologians deal with origins from the side of God's role in creation, scientists deal with origins from the side of the world's primordial history.

This way of viewing the overall objective of theology flows from the material condition of method understood as a plurality of sources (see previous section). It simultaneously flows from the classical interpretation of the hermeneutical condition as the timeless being of God (see the next section). The attempt to interpret Gen 1 "theologically" flows from within this constellation of methodological conditions. Within this presetting of the conditions of theological methodology, a "theological" interpretation of Gen 1 searches for the overall objective of theology, namely, God, and

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need to submit to the classical-Protestant theory of "verbal" or "plenary" inspiration. For an alternate theory of revelation-inspiration that overcomes the verbal-thought-encounter debate, consider the historical-cognitive model of revelation-inspiration (Canale, *Back to Revelation-Inspiration*, 127-153).

<sup>51</sup>"God and the soul are the main objectives of Saint Augustine" (cited from Augustine, *Soliloquies* I, 2, 7; II, 1, 1 by Armand Maurer, *Filosofia Medieval* [Barcelona: Emece, 1962], 2: 8 (my translation); see also Guillermo Fraile, *Historia de la Filosofia* [Madrid: BAC, 1966], 2: 208).

discards everything else as irrelevant for theological purposes. This methodological disruption of meaning violates the integrity of the multiple meanings and carefully interwoven referents that a careful exegesis reveals as present in the texts.

As far as I know, Adventists have not given specific thought to this issue. In Adventist circles, discussions related to this area of theological methodology usually revolve around the relative importance of practice and theory in theological education. Traditionally, Adventists seem to assume that the overall objective that theology attempts to achieve is the understanding of Scripture, thereby overlooking the task of systematic and practical theologies.

From the *sola Scriptura* methodological perspective, the definition of all theological objectives should spring from Scripture. Scripture suggests that the overall goal of theology may include attaining eternal life (Phil 3:11) as we come to know God and Christ (John 17:3). However, according to Scripture, the overall objective of theology may also include the understanding of God's works of creation and redemption. If this is so, the understanding of everything in relation to God is part of the overall objective of theology (Heb 2:8-10; Eph 1:10; 1 Cor 15:27-28).

If, instead of following Augustine's lead, Scripture is allowed to lead so that the overall objective of the theology also includes the knowledge of how God relates to everything including creation and history, then the content of the teleological condition of the theological method will be defined in a way that includes rather than excludes the world. Because the biblical definition of the overall objective of theology does not separate but rather historically integrates God and the world, we can now interpret Gen 1 "theologically" without disrupting the complexly interwoven net of meanings present in the text. Genesis speaks about God, its proper methodological objective. Science speaks about the world, its proper methodological objective. But when we define what a "theological" interpretation means from a biblical definition of the teleological condition of theological methodology, the world is included rather than excluded as the theological objective. In this context, a "theological" interpretation of Gen 1 does not allow us to harmonize Scripture with science.

Any "theological" interpretation of Gen 1, then, depends on the way in which theologians and exegetes define or implicitly assume the teleological condition of their theological methodology. Theologians willing to leave the traditional consensus behind and interpret the teleological and hermeneutical conditions of theological methodology from Scripture will discover that a different "theological" interpretation of Gen 1 is possible. This methodological shift will form a "theological" interpretation that, instead of calling for a separation of God from the realm of nature, calls for their integration. This interpretation is "theological" because it seeks to understand the origin of the world from data God originated through the

revelation and inspiration of Scripture.<sup>52</sup> Conversely, this interpretation is not “scientific” because it does not build its understanding from sensory experience, scientific method, or scientific theories.

The scientific search for understanding the origins of our planet and universe is a different and legitimate enterprise.<sup>53</sup> Yet, when we define the contents of the teleological condition of our theological method from Scripture and include in it not only God, but also his relations to nature and history, a partial overlapping with the overall objective of scientific methodology takes place. Though sharing the same teleological principle (i.e., understanding the origin of nature), scientific methodology and a biblically constructed theological methodology find the epistemological justification for their independent approaches in the radically different origin of the data from which they work (i.e., different views of the material condition). Scientific data originates from sensory-perception experiences. Theological data originates from divine revelation and inspiration. For this reason, complementarity is not possible. Instead, conflict between creation and evolution becomes possible. Harmonization between their teachings will depend on their contents. If their interpretations collide with each other, which discipline will surrender to the other? The way in which the material condition of theological method is defined will strongly influence the answer to this question. If Christian theology is built on a plurality of sources, biblical thought will tend to be adjusted to scientific and philosophical thinking. If, on the other hand, theology is built on the *sola Scriptura* principle, scientific and philosophical teachings will tend to be conformed to biblical thought. We now turn to the hermeneutical condition of theological methodology.

### The Hermeneutical Condition: Introduction

As scientific methodology assumes an a priori hermeneutical condition, so does theological methodology. The hermeneutical condition refers to the presuppositions that scientists and theologians must assume when they attempt to interpret their data and achieve the overall goals of their disciplines. In theological method, the hermeneutical condition provides the guiding principles for interpreting biblical texts and constructing the content of Christian theology. This condition of theology is by far the most complex and influential in processing data and in theory construction.

As in scientific methodology, theological methodology includes different levels of hermeneutical principles. According to their relative extension or inclusiveness, one can speak of micro-, meso-, and macro-

<sup>52</sup>This builds on the assumption of the *sola Scriptura* principle and the rejection of the plurality of sources or quadrilateral of sources.

<sup>53</sup>See Canale, “Evolution, Theology and Method, Part 2.”

hermeneutical principles.<sup>54</sup> Most Adventist theologians are better acquainted with biblical principles of interpretation (i.e., micro-hermeneutics) than with theological principles of interpretation (i.e., meso-hermeneutics), and have minimal awareness of the most inclusive ontological, epistemological, and articulation principles (i.e., macro-hermeneutics) used in interpreting micro- and meso-hermeneutical principles and the data of theology.<sup>55</sup>

Due to this scholarly situation, Adventists are likely to approach the creation-evolution debate as a dialogue/conflict between the “correct” way to interpret Gen 1<sup>56</sup> and the “assured” conclusions of scientific reflection.<sup>57</sup> In this way, the current debate bypasses the highly complex

<sup>54</sup>I borrow the designation “macro, meso and micro” from Kung, 134. Kung applies the terms to his analysis of the disciplinary matrix (i.e., methodological procedures) of theology. I use them to designate the guiding presuppositions that the task of doing Christian theology necessarily requires. For a discussion of macro-, meso- and micro-hermeneutical paradigms, see Fernando Canale, “Evangelical Theology and Open Theism: Toward a Biblical Understanding of the Macro Hermeneutical Principles of Theology?” *JATS* 12/2 (2001): 20-26.

<sup>55</sup>This situation is slowly changing. With the growth of worldwide Adventism and the origination of new universities and doctoral programs, research in this area has begun. Additionally, the forceful advent of postmodernity at the end of the twentieth century has also shown the need to deal seriously and in depth with the epistemological and cultural presuppositions of theology. Symptomatic of this beginning is volume 10, numbers 1 and 2 of the *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* published in 1999, titled “Hot Topics & Postmodernism Issue.” Identifying postmodernism as an issue shows awareness of its importance for the collective reflection of the church. Yet, only six out of twenty-eight articles related to postmodernity. This reveals the incipient status of this area of Adventist scholarship. The contributions of Rice’s *Reason and the Contours of Faith* (1991), Guy’s *Thinking Theologically* (1999), and Norman Gulley’s *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 2003) are a welcomed exception to the rule.

<sup>56</sup>Frederick E. J. Harder advises Adventists to make a nonliteral interpretation of Gen 1 (“Literary Structure of Genesis 1:1-2:3: An Overview,” in *Creation Reconsidered: Scientific, Biblical, and Theological Perspectives*, ed. James L. Hayward [Roseville, CA: Association of Adventist Forums, 2000], 245), while Guy urges a theological interpretation (Guy, “Interpreting Genesis One in the Twenty First Century,” in *Creation Reconsidered*, 11-13). Harder also thinks of creation in terms of Gen 1 rather than as a complex biblical doctrinal pattern, when he points out that Adventists are inconsistent “in affirming deep time for the universe and denying it for earth history” (“Theological Dimensions of the Doctrine of Creation,” 281). Harder, 245, concludes: “The creation narratives concede no authority for separating in time the creation of this planet from the universe beyond.” Harder does not seem to realize that in accepting deep time for the heavens and not for life on earth Adventists do not build on Gen 1 alone, but also on the Great Controversy understanding of Scripture that flows from the creation pattern scattered throughout the OT and NT. Besides, Davidson has persuasively argued that Gen 1 makes room for a “passive gap” between the creation of the universe (Gen 1:1-2) and the creation of our planet (Gen 1:3ff.) (“The Biblical Account of Origins, 20-25). Thus, there is no “Adventist inconsistency” as Harder suggests. Adventist discrimination between accepting deep time for the universe and rejecting it for life on earth stands on sound exegesis and on the overall pattern of biblical revelation about creation.

<sup>57</sup>“Progressive” Adventists’ certainty about evolution and deep time seems deeply rooted in their thinking (Hayward, “Preface,” in *Creation Reconsidered: Scientific, Biblical, and*

intellectual interpretive-methodological process through which we arrive at both theological and scientific conclusions.

Previously we addressed the nature and role of hermeneutical presuppositions in our general outline of scientific methodology<sup>58</sup> and its application to evolutionary method.<sup>59</sup> We turn now to the presence and operation of these presuppositions in classical-modern Christian theology and in specifically Adventist theology. As the goal of exegesis is to understand the meaning of biblical texts, so micro-hermeneutics assumes the basic literary and historical characteristics of biblical texts. As in theology, there is an attempt to understand realities instead of texts, so meso-hermeneutics assumes the basic characteristics of reality that each specific doctrine studies (e.g., God, Christ, church). Finally, since theology attempts to understand God and everything else in relation to God, exegetes and systematicians always assume general ideas (macro-hermeneutics) about God, human beings, the world, and the way in which they interact. Since theology is a search for understanding, in doing exegesis and systematic theology theologians also bring “pre-” understandings about the ways in which they understand God, humanity, and world, i.e., about the way in which they assume their cognitive capabilities to function and what these capabilities reach when operating properly. This includes an understanding of reason and of the means through which it receives its data (i.e., through the process of revelation-inspiration).

We must now consider briefly the way in which classical and modern theological models have interpreted the leading hermeneutical principles from which Christian theology has been constructed.

### *The Hermeneutical Condition: Classical-Modern Interpretation*

Shortly after the close of the NT canon, Christian theologians recognized the pivotal role that cosmology played in the construction of Christian theology.<sup>60</sup> As contemporary theologians do with the

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*Theological Perspectives*, ed. James L. Hayward [Roseville, CA: Association of Adventist Forums, 2000], 11-14). Their certainty seems grounded on the application of methodologies and assumptions broadly accepted as contemporary “normal science.” Thus, short of an epoch-making paradigm shift upsetting the currently “orthodox” evolutionary paradigm in the scientific community, Progressive Adventists’ certainty of the dictates of evolutionary science and deep time is not likely to change. This certainty is so high that persuasive arguments from biblical theologians or biblically originated science (scientific creationism) most likely will not change their minds.

<sup>58</sup>I discussed the presence, identification, and role of the hermeneutical conditions in scientific methodology briefly in the first article of this series, “Evolution, Theology, and Method, Part 1,” 79-84.

<sup>59</sup>I discussed the presence, identification, and role of the hermeneutical conditions in evolutionary methodology in “Evolution, Theology, and Method, Part 2,” 171-176.

<sup>60</sup>The first Christian theologians, called the Apologists (second and early third centuries), frequently chose a different strategy. They presented Jesus not as the

evolutionary theory, early Christian theologians did with Platonic cosmology: they incorporated the broadly accepted cosmology of their times into the material condition of their theological method. This perspective guided them in their interpretation of the reality (i.e., ontology) of God and of human beings (i.e., anthropological ontology).<sup>61</sup> The cosmology of the times was Neoplatonism.<sup>62</sup> Gnosticism followed it so closely that it almost destroyed the distinctive features of NT thinking.<sup>63</sup>

Classical theology rejected the extreme use of Neoplatonic thought as modeled in Gnostic syncretism, but settled for a more moderate usage of the same cosmological pattern.<sup>64</sup> This moderate use of Neoplatonic cosmology settled the fate of Christian theology. Neoplatonic cosmology became a leading hermeneutical light, guiding the Christian interpretation of divine and human ontologies to which it remained attached. Thus, the Greek timeless ontological understanding of God and human beings was introduced into Christian theology via the ontological interpretation of a timeless God and an immortal (i.e., timeless) soul.<sup>65</sup> Even today, most Christian theologians

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contradiction of Greek wisdom, but as its fulfillment. Justin Martyr (c. 100-c. 165) and Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-c. 215), for example, admitted that Christians had no monopoly on wisdom. They taught that the truth sought and explicated by Socrates and Plato found its fullest expression in Christ. The One whom Plato taught to be the source of everything was the Father of Jesus the Christ. The synthesis between the wisdom of the Greeks and Christian revelation attempted by the Apologists defines the theological task. Its presupposition undergirds the history of the Catholic thought" (Jack A. Bonsor, *Athens and Jerusalem: The Role of Philosophy in Theology* [New York, NY: Paulist, 1993], 23-24).

<sup>61</sup>Paul Tillich explains that "Neo-Platonism is important not only because of its influence on Origen, who produced the first great theological system, but because through Dionysius Areopagite it influenced all later forms of Christian mysticism and most forms of classical Christian theology, especially with respect to the doctrines of God, the world, and the soul. It is impossible to understand the further development of Christian theology without knowing something about Neo-Platonism, the last great attempt of paganism to express itself in terms of a philosophical theology, which was both science and life for the ancient mind" (*A History of Christian Thought: From Its Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism* [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967], 50-51).

<sup>62</sup>J. N. D. Kelly states: "In Neo-Platonism, the tendency to make God transcendent was carried as far as it could go. This was that fully developed system, Platonic in its main inspiration, but incorporating Aristotelian, Stoic and even Oriental elements, which flourished from the middle of the third century and with which the fathers of the second half of our period were familiar. It is best exemplified by Plotinus (205-270), the Greek-speaking Egyptian who was its founder and also one of the greatest thinkers of the ancient world" (*Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. ed. [San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1960], 20).

<sup>63</sup>Justo L. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970), 1:140.

<sup>64</sup>For a detailed introduction to Gnosticism, see Simone Pétremont, *A Separate God: The Origins and Teachings of Gnosticism*, trans. Carol Harrison (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1984).

<sup>65</sup>Jaroslav Pelikan notes: "Two Christian doctrines are perhaps the most reliable

accept, as a methodological fact, that the Christian faith results from reflection upon data provided by a multiplicity of sources.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, the broad ontological principles of Greek philosophy determine the way Christian thinkers assume the nature of material and spiritual realities on which the classical Roman Catholic and Protestant theologies are constructed. Platonic cosmology conceived the world as a composite of two tiers: a timeless, spaceless world or level of reality and our spatiotemporal world or tier of reality. Material realities are spatiotemporal; spiritual realities are neither spatial nor temporal.

This cosmological dualism<sup>67</sup> became the guiding hermeneutical principle theologians used to interpret the biblical notion of God as timeless and nonhistorical and the reality of human beings as a composite of spiritual-timeless (the soul) and material (the body) substances.<sup>68</sup> Thus, the dualistic pattern of Greek Platonic and Aristotelian ontologies shaped the way in which classical theologians understood the components of the principle of reality (i.e., God, human nature, and the world) of the hermeneutical condition of theological methodology. As successive generations of theologians called on these notions to play a hermeneutical role in their theological reflection, the system of classical Roman Catholic and Protestant theologies came into

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indications of the continuing hold of Greek philosophy on Christian theology: the doctrine of the immortality of the soul and the doctrine of the absoluteness of God" (*The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* [Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1971], 1:5). He, 5, also states that "the idea of the immortal and rational soul is part of the Greek inheritance in Christian doctrine; Thomas Aquinas and Philip Melancthon are only two of the many theologians to compose treatises with the title *On the Soul* whose content was determined more by philosophical than by biblical language about the soul."

<sup>66</sup>Regarding the multiplicity of sources in the classical evangelical tradition, see Albert C. Outler, who identifies Scripture, tradition, experience, and reason (*The Wesleyan Theological Heritage*, ed. Thomas C. Oden and Leicester R. Longden [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991], 22-37). In the modernist tradition, Tracy identifies two main sources: Christian texts and common human experience (a phenomenology of "religious dimension" present in everyday and scientific experience and language) (*Blessed Rage for Order*, 43-63).

<sup>67</sup>Plato's view of the cosmos is "dualism" and not mere "duality," where two different levels of reality interact, because, according to him, the earthly lower world of history and nature "duplicates" the higher world of timeless realities. Plato put it this way: "Now the nature of the ideal being was everlasting, but to bestow this attribute in its fullness upon a creature was impossible. Wherefore he resolved to have a moving image of eternity" (*Tim.* 37.d).

<sup>68</sup>Regarding the doctrine of God, Pelikan, 1:5, remarks that the notion of divine impassivity was taken from Greek ontology and customarily assumed by theologians "as an axiom, without bothering to provide very much biblical support or theological proof." Finally, Pelikan, 1:53, notices that "whether the theologians found Platonic speculation compatible with the gospel or incompatible with it, they were agreed that the Christian understanding of the relation between Creator and creature required 'the concept of an entirely static God, with eminent reality, in relation to an entirely fluent world, with deficient reality'—a concept that came into Christian doctrine from Greek philosophy."

existence through an intellectual process similar to what Thomas Kuhn describes as “normal science” in the natural sciences.<sup>69</sup>

The classical theological synthesis reached its high point with Augustine and Aquinas. A minor paradigm shift took place when dissatisfaction with the “normal” theological thinking of the time led Luther and Calvin to “reform” the classical system of theology, thus introducing a paradigm shift in the normal theological science of the times.<sup>70</sup> Their theological reformation, however, still stood on the earlier application of Platonic cosmology to biblical teachings via Augustine’s thought patterns.<sup>71</sup>

Thus, to this day, Platonic cosmology continues to be a leading macro-hermeneutical principle of Christian theology. Particularly, it continues to determine the ontological background from which Christians understand the natural and supernatural levels necessarily involved in theological thinking. Accordingly, reality is understood to include two major levels: the spiritual and the material. God and theology belong to the spiritual; natural science belongs to the material. The spiritual order comprises the order of timeless realities and their “logical” order of causality, where historical sequential causality does not take place.

The material order embraces all realities and causes occurring in the

<sup>69</sup>Thomas S. Kuhn defines “normal science” as “research firmly based upon one or more past scientific achievements, achievements that some particular scientific community acknowledges for a time as supplying the foundations for its further practice” (*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2d ed. [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970], 10). He, 10-51, further expanded his notion of normal science in the hard-science domain in the same book. A number of leading theologians met in Tübingen to consider the application of Kuhn’s notions of normal science and paradigm shift in the realm of Christian theology. The papers and discussions presented in the symposium were published in Hans Küng and David Tracy, eds., *Paradigm Change in Theology: A Symposium for the Future* (New York: Crossroad, 1991). Hans Küng published his own take on the issue in his *Theology for the Third Millennium*. See also, Frank M. Hasel, “Thomas Kuhn’s Concept of Paradigm and Paradigm Change,” *JATS* 2/2 (1991): 160-177.

<sup>70</sup>Stephan Pfürtner tentatively concludes that “the Reformers, with their theologically influential supporters and their communities, pursued a highly intensive ‘study’ of the new paradigm in its interpretative framework” (“The Paradigms of Thomas Aquinas and Martin Luther: Did Luther’s Message of Justification Mean a Paradigm Change?” in *Paradigm Change in Theology*, ed. Hans Küng and David Tracy [New York: Crossroad, 1991], 130-160). See also Hans Küng, *Christianity: Essence, History, and Future*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Continuum, 1995), 539-577.

<sup>71</sup>According to Pelikan: “The presupposition for the doctrine of justification was a vigorous reassertion of Augustinian anthropology” (*The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, 4:139). Calvin makes clear that he is in total agreement with Augustine’s thinking: “Augustine is so much at one with me that, if I wished to write a confession of my faith, it would abundantly satisfy me to quote wholesale from his writings” (*Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, trans. J. K. Reid [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977], 63). It goes without saying that in such a coincidence of thought, the basic philosophical ontology and epistemological presuppositions on which Augustine built his theology were attached by default to Calvin’s and Luther’s theological paradigm.

spatiotemporal continuum (i.e., nature and history). Here historical and natural causes take place. According to this theological paradigm, God's reality and actions are timeless and spaceless. This understanding of God, derived from Greek ontology, creates a chasm between God, who exists in the timeless level of reality, and the level of nature and history. This chasm does not exist in biblical thinking, where God interacts directly within the historical, spatiotemporal flow of his creation.

For centuries, Christian theologians have attempted to solve the many theological problems created by this ontological view of God and the world. With time, the Roman Catholic synthesis came to understand the logic of Christianity in a way substantially different from the historical logic of biblical thinking. Protestant and modernistic<sup>72</sup> syntheses continued to operate within the boundaries imposed by Platonic cosmology.<sup>73</sup>

Following this ontological dichotomy between God and the world, Catholic and Protestant theologies study causation within the timeless level of spiritual realities to which the Christian doctrines of God, salvation, sacraments, justification by faith, predestination, providence, and creation belong. From this hermeneutical perspective, the historical portrayals of divine actions and salvific operations that are found in Scripture become illustrations or symbols pointing to theological realities, but are not descriptions of how things really are.

The way one understands the hermeneutical principle of reality determines the way in which one understands the principle of knowledge. Thus, Augustine also set the methodological structure of the classical principle of knowledge. Real, true knowledge reaches the timeless truths of God. Thus, theology (wisdom) studies what is eternal (timeless) and science (knowledge) considers what is temporal.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>72</sup>Friedrich Schleiermacher, the father of modern theology, continues to accept the Greek philosophical notion of divine timelessness (*The Christian Faith*, trans. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928], §52, 1-2, and postscript). Karl Barth also affirms the timelessness of God: "The being is eternal in whose duration beginning, succession and end are not three but one, not separate as a first, a second and a third occasion, but one simultaneous occasion as beginning, middle and end. Eternity is the simultaneity of beginning, middle and end, and to that extent it is pure duration. Eternity is God in the sense in which in himself and in all things God is simultaneous, i.e., beginning and middle as well as end, without separation, distance or contradiction. Eternity is not, therefore, time, although time is certainly God's creation or more correctly, a form of His creation. Time is distinguished from eternity by the fact that in it beginning, middle and end are distinct and even opposed as past, present and future" (*Church Dogmatics*, trans. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936], II/1, 608-677). Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1949), 266-270.

<sup>73</sup>That the timelessness of God continues to be at the center of the modernistic theological synthesis becomes apparent as Pannenberg revives Plotinus's Neo-Platonic understanding of timelessness (*Systematic Theology*, 1:401-410).

<sup>74</sup>Augustine of Hippo states: "If therefore this is the right distinction between wisdom and knowledge, that the intellectual cognizance of eternal things belongs to wisdom, but the rational cognizance of temporal things to knowledge, it is not difficult

The modern model of theology springs from Immanuel Kant's notion that humanity can know only what is temporal and spatial.<sup>75</sup> If, as, according to the classical hermeneutical principles, God and the soul are timeless, then reason cannot know them. On this basis, Friedrich Schleiermacher shaped the material principle of theology on the experience of absolute dependence.<sup>76</sup>

### The Hermeneutical Condition: Biblical Interpretation

Since its origin, Adventism has worked from a specific macro-hermeneutical perspective that E. G. White called the "pillars" of Adventist faith. She specifically named four pillars: the Sanctuary, the Three Angels' Messages, the Sabbath, and the nonimmortality of the soul.<sup>77</sup> Particularly the Sanctuary and fulfilled prophecy became macro-hermeneutical presuppositions that influenced the shape of Adventist theology for more than a century.<sup>78</sup>

During the second half of the twentieth century, many Adventists began to do theology from the meso-hermeneutical perspective of justification by faith, thereby slowly departing from the original macro-hermeneutical perspective and adopting the Protestant approach. Most Adventists are unaware that the biblical-eschatological-sanctuary and the Protestant-soteriological-justification-by-faith macro-hermeneutical perspectives assume quite different interpretations of God, human beings, the world, the whole of reality, and reason.

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to judge which is to be preferred or postponed to which" (*The Trinity*, ed. Philip Schaff, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, vol. 3 (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), 12: 15, 25. Notice how Augustine's cosmological dichotomy regarding God's timelessness and the world's temporalness determines his understanding of the science-theology relation. This strengthens the notion of complementarity between science and theology derived from Augustine's interpretation of the teleological principle considered above.

<sup>75</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. J. M. D. Meiklejohn (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus, 1990), 43, 325.

<sup>76</sup>See, e.g., Schleiermacher, §3, 3.

<sup>77</sup>Ellen White states: "The passing of the time in 1844 was a period of great events, opening to our astonished eyes the cleansing of the sanctuary transpiring in heaven, and having decided relation to God's people upon the earth, [also] the first and second angels' messages and the third, unfurling the banner on which was inscribed, 'The commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.' One of the landmarks under this message was the temple of God, seen by His truth-loving people in heaven, and the ark containing the law of God. The light of the Sabbath of the fourth commandment flashed its strong rays in the pathway of the transgressors of God's law. The nonimmortality of the wicked is an old landmark. I can call to mind nothing more that can come under the head of the old landmarks. All this cry about changing the old landmarks is all imaginary" (*Counsels to Writers and Editors*, 31).

<sup>78</sup>Richard W. Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf note that the "basic concepts" of these doctrines were "worked out by the end of 1848," and remained dominant within Adventism at least through 1957 (*Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* [Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2000], 65-67, 454-457).

The soteriological perspective of Protestantism implicitly builds on the classical interpretation of macro-hermeneutics that was a carry-over from Roman Catholic theology. It explicitly follows Greek philosophical ideas that clearly contradict biblical ideas on the same issues. For instance, according to the classical view, God is a timeless, spaceless being. Correspondingly, human beings are a soul-body composite (i.e., the soul is a timeless-spaceless entity). The inner logic of these macro-hermeneutical ideas determines most theological content in the Roman Catholic and evangelical theological syntheses. Most evangelical theologians, who claim to give a prominent role to the *prima Scriptura* principle in the Wesleyan quadrilateral of theological sources, are not aware that they implicitly build on notions derived from Greek philosophy, which were adopted by way of tradition.

Early Adventists, however, established implicit macro-hermeneutical principles that were based on a more critical approach to tradition<sup>79</sup> and a “keener appreciation for the authority of the entire Bible” than those of the Protestant reformers.<sup>80</sup> From this understanding of the material principle of method they not only interpreted biblical prophecy, but used it as a macro-hermeneutical presupposition to interpret the entire doctrinal corpus of Christian theology.<sup>81</sup>

The hermeneutical principles of Adventist theology, then, do not derive from philosophy or science, but from Scripture. So far, however, they have operated primarily in an implicit rather than an explicit way. Though they are present in and operate from what the early Adventists identified as the “pillar” doctrines of Adventism, Adventists have not yet identified them technically or used them in the context of theological methodology.

In a summary way, the doctrine of the Sanctuary assumes a temporal-historical understanding of the being of God that in Adventist theology has

<sup>79</sup>C. Mervyn Maxwell, “A Brief History of Adventist Hermeneutics,” *JATS* 4 (1993): 213-214.

<sup>80</sup>Maxwell, 214, observes that “the Reformers insisted on the superlative authority of Scripture, yet Adventists have shown a keener appreciation for the authority of the entire Bible. Luther is well known for his tendency to reject James, make very little use of Hebrews, and set up a canon within the canon. Calvin virtually rejected the book of Revelation. The later Scottish-American reformers, Thomas and Alexander Campbell, contemporaries of the Adventist pioneers, rejected the entire OT.”

<sup>81</sup>Maxwell, 214-215, comments: “Luther and other Reformers honored the historicist interpretation of prophecy, including the year-day principle. But the Seventh-day Adventist pioneers, having arrived by the same route at the conviction that the Second Advent movement was a fulfillment of prophecy, used that fulfillment as a hermeneutical principle in the further development of their message. Once established as scriptural, the fulfillment of prophecy in the second advent movement became a hermeneutical tool for helping establishing [sic] the Sabbath, sanctuary, spiritual gifts, true church, second advent doctrine, etc.” The so-called “pillars of the church” doctrines—the Sanctuary, Three Angels’ Messages, nonimmortality of the soul, and the Law and the Sabbath—also played macro-hermeneutical roles in the formation of Adventist theology.

implicitly replaced the philosophically originated timeless understanding of God. The historicity of God's being and actions is the implicit ontological basis on which the historicist interpretation of prophecy, the process notion of divine atonement as an ongoing historical work of Christ in heaven, and the Great Controversy approach to systematic theology are interpreted and constructed. Next to the historical understanding of God stands the historical understanding of human beings, implicit in the Adventist denial of the philosophically originated idea of the immortality of the soul and the affirmation of a wholistic understanding of human beings. The biblical ontology of God and human beings also implies radical changes in the epistemological principle of the hermeneutical condition of theological methodology.

This paradigmatic fracture at the macro-hermeneutical level seriously threatens the theological unity of Adventism. It also sets the stage for two different approaches to the creation-evolution debate.

### *Evolution and Christian Theologies*

After reviewing alternative approaches, Fritz Guy concludes: "Wandering around the highways and byways of recent theology, I have not encountered even one example of a serious, sustained theological argument for affirming the creation of the world in six literal days a few thousand years ago."<sup>82</sup> Is Adventist belief in a seven-day-twenty-four-hour historical process of creation<sup>83</sup> not only in contradiction with scientific "facts," but also theologically naive?<sup>84</sup> Why can other Christian denominations and theologians accept evolution and yet remain Christian? Does a persistent literal reading of the Genesis account as a historical process, in spite of scientific findings, reveal a theological naivete that distorts the truth of Christian theology? Does harmonization of Christian theology with evolutionary theory reveal a deeper and more mature level of theological thinking that brings us closer to understanding the truth and mystery of Christianity? To answer these questions, it is necessary to consider briefly how other

<sup>82</sup>Fritz Guy, "Genesis and Geology: Some Contemporary Theological Perspectives," in *Creation Reconsidered: Scientific, Biblical, and Theological Perspectives*, ed. James L. Hayward (Roseville, CA: Association of Adventist Forums, 2000), 300.

<sup>83</sup>Fundamental Belief, no. 6: "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" (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . : A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* [Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1988], 68).

<sup>84</sup>Guy, "Genesis and Geology," 289.

theological methods and systems are able to harmonize the biblical doctrine of creation with evolutionary theory.

There are different ways of harmonizing evolution and science. Maximal harmonization involves the acceptance of the full evolutionary theory.<sup>85</sup> Minimal harmonization involves the acceptance of deep time and the fossil column, stopping short of harmonizing theology with evolutionary patterns of development.<sup>86</sup> Conservative Protestant theologians with a high view of Scripture are likely to embrace a

<sup>85</sup>Theistic evolution and Process theologies are examples of this type of maximal harmonization. Wolfhart Pannenberg's view of creation is both interesting and imaginative. He conceives God's entity as timeless, but inclusive of all temporality and finitude (*Systematic Theology*, 1: 410). From this basis, he, 2:34, deals extensively with the act of creation from within the act of trinitarian life. He concludes his long explanation of the "trinitarian origin of the act of creation" remarking that "a trinitarian exposition of the concept of creation makes it possible, then, to relate what is said about creation to the totality of the world from the standpoint of its duration in time. It does not concern merely the world's beginning. To limit it to the beginning, as the OT stories seem to do in accordance with near Eastern myths of a primal era, is one-sided." Without mentioning deep time or evolutionary theory, Pannenberg's view opens room for it as part of the "totality of the word" that is included in God's timelessness and creative activity.

<sup>86</sup>Erickson, 409, adopts a minimalist harmonization by affirming "progressive creationism." According to this idea, God created every kind perfect as Scripture says, not after the schedule and pattern revealed in Genesis. Rather creation follows the evolutionary timetable. Erickson, 407, argues his harmonization model on the basis that the meaning of the Hebrew word for day (*yôm*) is not limited to a twenty-four-hour period. Erickson forgets that "the phrase 'evening and morning,' appearing at the conclusion of each of the six days of creation, is used by the author to clearly define the nature of the 'days' of creation as literal twenty-four-hours days. The references to 'evening' and 'morning' together outside of Gen 1, invariably without exception in the OT (57 times, 19 times with *yôm* 'day' and 38 without *yôm*), indicate a literal solar day. Again, the occurrences of *yôm* 'day' at the conclusion of each of the six 'days' of creation in Gen 1 are all connected with a numeric adjective ('one [first] day, 'second day,' third day,' etc.), and a comparison with occurrences of the term elsewhere in Scripture reveals that such usage always refer to literal days" (Davidson, 14). For a summary of the exegetical arguments and counter-arguments against and in favor of a twenty-four-hour interpretation of *yôm* in Gen 1, see Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1994), 293-297).

It is interesting to notice that Erickson's theological method does not make room for his "progressive creationism." Erickson, 56, claims that revelation supplies "the major tenets of our understanding of reality" and that "whenever a tradition, whether it is a teaching of ancient origin or of a recent popular leader, comes into conflict with the meaning of the Bible, the tradition must give way to Scripture" (*ibid.*, 284). To be consistent with his stated methodology Erickson should affirm the six-days creation pattern of Gen 1 and deal with deep time from that perspective. Erickson's partial harmonization of Gen 1 to deep time is not convincing. It may help pastors to preempt questions from a scientifically educated audience. Yet, by itself deep time has no power of explanation. It requires an ontological-cosmological theory. By affirming deep time as real, Erickson provides the first step toward adopting evolutionary theory. He will not take it now. Yet, other believers will unavoidably follow the inner logic of his first step to include the evolutionary pattern of explanation. Besides, the notion that God created a little here and there through billions of years raises questions regarding biblical claims about his omniscience, foreknowledge, wisdom, power, mercy, and love.

minimalist harmonization.<sup>87</sup> The concrete way in which maximalists and minimalists interpret the various conditions of theological method determines both models of harmonization.

It has already been argued that the general acceptance of evolution in contemporary society stems more from its power of explanation than from its empirical ground.<sup>88</sup> Now it is necessary to examine the hermeneutical effect that harmonization with evolutionary cosmology would have on Adventist theology by becoming aware of what it takes to harmonize Christian doctrine with evolutionary theory. The complex structure of theological method discussed above suggests that the issue of harmonization should be analyzed from the perspective of theological methodology and systematic theology. For this reason, it is important to understand the way in which classical theological methodology led to the construction of the classical theological system behind what are today known as the Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions.

The Christian doctrine of creation does not escape the reach of the hermeneutical condition of method. On the contrary, because classical theology assumes the ontological dichotomy between a timeless God and a temporal world, the classical doctrine of creation explains that the existence and design of the universe come from God's ontological,

<sup>87</sup>While deep time arguments persuade Grudem's, 308, mind scientifically, he recognizes that "Scripture seems to be more easily understood to suggest (but not to require) a young earth view, while the observable facts of creation seem increasingly to favor an old earth view." Since he, 308, sees science and Scripture as inconclusive on the age of the earth, he suggests increasing dialogue between old and young earth believers. He, then, stops short of harmonizing. Dialogue, however, only delays the moment of commitment. Should he stand by Scripture or should he harmonize Scripture to the teachings of evolutionary science? Grudem begs the question. Stanley Grenz stops short of endorsing evolutionary theory, due mainly to the epistemological limitations of science. Yet he quotes approvingly the notion that the Bible and evolution are not mutually exclusive (*Theology for the Community of God* [Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994], 147-148). Since for Grenz there will be no resolution between evolution and the biblical account of the creation of humans, he is prepared to harmonize. He, 149, does this by taking an essentialist view of human nature: "Regardless of how Adam actually appeared on the earth, God's purposes in creation reach a new plane with Adam. Beginning with this creature, God is at work in a special way on the earth, for he has determined a unique destiny for Adam and Adam's offspring." Grenz, 149, further explains that "humanity begins at a specific point in the history of the universe, namely, with the appearance of Adam on the earth. With Adam (or 'homo sapiens') and solely with Adam, God enters into a special relationship or covenant. In this covenant God declares a new intention for creation, namely, that his creation—Adam and his offspring— fulfill a special destiny by being related to God in a way unique from all other aspects of the universe that God has made." Technically speaking, Adam is created when, in the process of evolution, God decides to infuse an immortal soul probably in the womb of one hominid (*ibid.*, 149, 167). Thus is how we come "to have" an "eternal" soul, which is the basis of our individuality (*ibid.* 167). Grenz's position builds on classical anthropological dualism and agrees with the Roman Catholic position, which accepts evolution as an explanation for the body, but traces the origin of the soul to God's creation.

<sup>88</sup>Canale, "Evolution, Theology, and Method, Part 2," 182.

timeless reality. This ontological, spiritual reference to God's power to bring things into existence is what theology can properly say about creation. Further, in order for this ontology of divine reality to work as a hermeneutical condition of theological method, it requires a "theological" rather than literal-historical reading of Gen 1. Again, the reason for a "theological" reading of Gen 1 is not for the exegesis of Scripture, but to seek the ontology of divine reality that theologians bring to the text. According to this view, then, the text of Gen 1 represents only an external clothing or illustration of the real ontological order of spiritual causes, within which God operates in creation. The Genesis narrative of creation is only an illustration "for us," so that we can understand within our own level and patterns of understanding what God does in his level of being and action.

Therefore, we should not understand the biblical narrative literally, because it speaks about an act of God that does not take place in time, but in timelessness. To express the theological meaning of the text, then, theologians *translate* biblical-historical language and categories into spiritual, timeless language and categories.<sup>89</sup> This process has been going on for more than fifteen centuries and has a firm hold on Christian theology as a whole.

For instance, Augustine clearly states that God creates by his timeless Word,<sup>90</sup> which is not related to the history of divine activities

<sup>89</sup>The timeless ontology of God and his activity requires the application of category translation. Statements about creation have a double ontological referent: timeless divine activity and the temporal processes that actually take place in space and time. What Scripture presents as having a temporal-historical referent, the timeless definition of the hermeneutical condition of the theological methodology requires to be translated into its proper nonhistorical, philosophical referent, God's acts. As a result, there is also a category translation at the historical level. John T. Baldwin defines category translation within the realm of biblical exegesis in the following way: "Category translation is the contemporary refashioning or translation of ancient biblical stories—particularly those recounting earth history—into categories other than those categories which may have been intended by the original author. Perhaps we might say that the narratives are translated into extrascriptural categories. The purpose of category translation is to render the biblical passage meaningful in light of the interpretations of earth history by modern and postmodern natural sciences" ("Category Translation," [unpublished paper, Biblical Research Institute Science Committee, 1999], 5). Thus, there is a double category translation, an ontological and a historical. The ontological translation relates the historical meanings of the text to the timeless reality of divine realities and takes place in systematic theology. The historical category translation transposes the literal historical meanings of OT and NT texts to other historical meanings determined by contemporary science and culture. But category translation violates the biblical text.

<sup>90</sup>Augustine of Hippo states: "Thou callest us then to understand the Word, God, with Thee God, Which is spoken eternally, and by It are all things spoken eternally. For what was spoken was not spoken successively, one thing concluded that the next might be spoken, but all things together and eternally. Else have we time and change; and not a true eternity nor true immortality. This I know, O my God, and give thanks. I know, I confess to Thee, O Lord, and with me there knows and blesses Thee, who is not unthankful to assure Truth. We know, Lord, we know; since inasmuch as anything is not which was, and is, which was not, so far forth it dieth and ariseth. Nothing then of Thy Word doth give place or replace, because It is truly immortal and eternal. And therefore

found in Gen 1-2.<sup>91</sup> According to Aquinas, creation is the emanation from God of all being<sup>92</sup> (“the world”), that “took” place by divine timeless action,<sup>93</sup> which, in turn, originated time without movement.<sup>94</sup> This implies that God’s creation “took” place in the first instant when the whole world “came” into existence. This instant, being the beginning of time, was real to the world but not to God. Because the Genesis account describes a temporal series of divine actions, it portrays divine creation through sensory figures designed to “illustrate” the truth we reach by way of reasoning.

Calvin is more biblical by far than either Augustine or Aquinas. He takes seriously the history of creation presented by Moses. In his

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unto the Word coeternal with Thee Thou dost at once and eternally say all that Thou dost say; and whatever Thou sayest shall be made is made; nor dost Thou make, otherwise than by saying; and yet are not all things made together, or everlasting, which Thou makest by saying” (*Confessions* [Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1996], 11. 7).

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 13.29: “And I looked narrowly to find, whether seven, or eight times Thou sawest that Thy works were good, when they pleased Thee; but in Thy seeing I found no times, whereby I might understand that Thou sawest so often, what Thou madest. And I said, ‘Lord, is not this Thy Scripture true, since Thou art true, and being Truth, hast set it forth? Why then dost Thou say unto me, ‘that in Thy seeing there be no times’; whereas this Thy Scripture tells me, that what Thou madest each day, Thou sawest that it was good: and when I counted them, I found how often.’ Unto this Thou answerest me, for Thou art my God, and with a strong voice tellest Thy servant in his inner ear, breaking through my deafness and crying, ‘O man, that which My Scripture saith, I say: and yet doth that speak in time; but time has no relation to My Word; because My Word exists in equal eternity with Myself. So the things which ye see through My Spirit, I see; like as what ye speak by My Spirit, I speak. And so when ye see those things in time, I see them not in time; as when ye speak in time, I speak them not in time.’”

<sup>92</sup>Thomas Aquinas states: “We must consider not only the emanation of a particular being from a particular agent, but also the emanation of all being from the universal cause, which is God; and this emanation we designate by the name of creation. Now what proceeds by particular emanation is not presupposed to that emanation; as when a man is generated, he was not before, but man is made from ‘not man,’ and white from ‘not-white.’ Hence if the emanation of the whole universal being from the first principle be considered, it is impossible that any being should be presupposed before this emanation. For nothing is the same as no being. Therefore, as the generation of a man is from the ‘not being’ which is ‘not-man,’ so creation, which is the emanation of all being, is from the ‘not-being’ which is ‘nothing’” (*STh*, Ia.45.1).

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., Ia.46.1.ob.8: “God is prior to the world by priority of duration. But the word ‘prior’ signifies priority not of time, but of eternity. Or we may say that it signifies the eternity of imaginary time, and not of time really existing.”

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., Ia.45.2.ob.2: “Creation places something in the thing created according to relation only; because what is created, is not made by movement, or by change. For what is made by movement or by change is made from something pre-existing. And this happens, indeed, in the particular productions of some beings, but cannot happen in the production of all being by the universal cause of all beings, which is God. Hence God by creation produces things without movement. Now when movement is removed from action and passion, only relation remains, as was said above.” “Hence creation in the creature is only a certain relation to the Creator as to the principle of its being; even as in passion, which implies movement, is implied a relation to the principle of motion” (*ibid.*, Ia.45.3).

*Institutes*, Calvin explains that even though God could have created the whole world instantaneously, he divided the formation of the world into six days “to display his providence and paternal care towards us in this, that before he formed man, he provided whatever he foresaw would be useful and salutary to him.”<sup>95</sup> Yet, he articulates the logic or inner coherence of Christian theology following Augustine’s interpretation of predestination that operates in the nonhistorical level of spiritual realities. At the center of this logic is the gospel, which God causes in his eternal predestination.<sup>96</sup> Salvation clearly belongs to the realm of the spirit rather than history. For this reason, divine decrees follow a logical rather than a chronological order. In conclusion, due to accommodation to the Platonic two-tier cosmology, Christian theology conceives God’s acts as taking place within the logic of spiritual-timeless causality (events). In this context, it should not be surprising that the six-day history of creation has little relevance in the doctrine of creation or in the economy of salvation.

During the classical period, there was no reason to challenge the veracity of the Genesis story. Christian theologians and scientists accepted it as the explanation of the origin of the natural realm. However, with the advent of modern science and evolutionary theory, things changed. Since modern scientists no longer believe in creation and the biblical story, what would theologians do? Each theologian answers according to his or her own “kind.” The methodological parameters accepted by a theological tradition (specifically, the material, teleological, and hermeneutical conditions of method) determines a theological “kind.” Because most theologians define the material condition of method as containing multiple sources, the doctrine of evolution becomes somehow “authoritative” for them. The teachings of modern science are for modern theology as authoritative as the ontological and cosmological teaching of Plato and Aristotle were for patristic and medieval theologians.

Moreover, because the hermeneutical condition generally accepted in Christian theology places God and his actions in the spiritual nontemporal level of reality, classical and modern theological methods have room for scientific explanations of the natural historical order that run parallel to theological truths without contradiction because each explains a different parallel complementary perspective of reality. Not surprisingly, then, Catholic and Protestant theologians, working from a theological methodology that defines its ontological hermeneutics from Greek ontological principles, will see the accommodation of Gen 1 to deep time and evolutionary theory as not affecting their theological beliefs. After all, Genesis achieves its explanation in the temporal order, which by the criteria

<sup>95</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Calvin Translation Society, 1845-1846 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997), I.14.22.

<sup>96</sup>Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, 58.

of theological methodology belongs to the scientific rather than the theological field of investigation. Thus, within the classical and modern theological methods, the doctrine of evolution may be considered the true historical explanation of the way in which life on this planet originated, provided that one does not use it also as the explanation for the origin and dynamics of the spiritual side of reality.

At the same time, theologians have their own spiritual, ontological truth about creation in that they affirm that the entire process, as described by evolution, stands on God's power and grace. Within this methodological understanding, John Paul II was able to recognize evolution as a scientific theory that, at the present time, seems to more accurately explain the history of the origins of our planet. However, the church does not accept evolution as the explanation of the origin of the human soul, because only God originates spiritual reality.<sup>97</sup>

Though the notions of evolution and deep time do not appear to reach to the spiritual core of classical theology, they nevertheless become part of the principle of reality of theological method. The hermeneutical application of deep time and evolutionary theories to theological thinking modifies Christian beliefs on providence and salvation history that are essential to the Adventist system of Great Controversy theology. "Providence and salvation history," explains Dulles, "take on a whole new significance when seen against the background of the billions of years of cosmic existence postulated by contemporary science but undreamt of by

<sup>97</sup>Pope John Paul II built his remarks on Pius XII's conviction that there was no opposition between evolution and the doctrine of the faith about man and his vocation, on condition that one did not lose sight of several indisputable points (Encyclical *Humani generis* [1950]). "Today, almost half a century after the publication of the Encyclical, new knowledge has led to the recognition of more than one hypothesis in the theory of evolution. It is indeed remarkable that this theory has been progressively accepted by researchers, following a series of discoveries in various fields of knowledge. The convergence, neither sought nor fabricated, of the results of work that was conducted independently is in itself a significant argument in favour of this theory" ("Message to Pontifical Academy of Sciences" (<http://abbey.apana.org.au/articles/0044.htm>, October 22, 1996), 4. John Paul II reminds us that Pius XII considered the immortality of the soul an "indisputable point." It is accepted Catholic ontological teaching that even though the "human body takes its origin from pre-existent living matter [the spatiotemporal-historical realm] the spiritual soul is immediately created by God" ("*Animal enim a Deo immediate creari catholica fides nos retinere inhet*"; Encyclical *Humani generis*, AAS 42 [1950], 575). John Paul II, 575, concludes: "Consequently theories of evolution which, in accordance with the philosophies inspiring them, consider the mind as emerging from the forces of living matter, or as a mere epiphenomenon of this matter, are incompatible with the truth about man. Nor are they able to ground the dignity of the person." Thus the clearly marked parameters of classical theological methodology from which the Pope harmonizes Catholic belief in the immortality of the soul (derived from Greek ontology) with present teachings of evolutionary cosmology are seen. Evolution, as theory, can apply to the scientific study of the material world and causation. The spiritual world where God acts and the Church mediates belongs to philosophical and theological interpretation grounded on Greek ontological patterns and supervised by the Magisterium.

Bishop Ussher and his contemporaries.”<sup>98</sup>

### *Evolution and Adventist Theology*

Is Seventh-day Adventist theology compatible with the evolutionary metanarrative, according to which life on our planet originated through deep time by way of a process in which higher organisms of life emerged from lower forms? Can Adventist theology be harmonized with evolutionary science? The question is not merely whether evolution is compatible with the Genesis account of creation, but whether evolution is coherent with the Adventist theological system of beliefs. What would happen to Adventist beliefs and mission if Adventists become convinced that evolution describes the way in which things came into existence? Can Adventist theology answer these questions by borrowing the macro-hermeneutical pattern of Christian theology described above?

These questions are important because some Adventist scholars wrestling with evolutionary issues seem to have become convinced that evolutionary science is true.<sup>99</sup> How did this happen? Adventist scientists and theologians adopt evolutionary ideas by engaging themselves in the process of normal contemporary evolutionary science.<sup>100</sup> In simple terms, scientists and theologians adopt evolutionary theory because they learn it as the methodological paradigm within which their objects of study make sense; the power of explanation makes evolution persuasive; and in their eyes, the scientific method used in its construction makes it “true.” Once these convictions set in the mind, they become powerful macro-hermeneutical presuppositions requiring not only the reinterpretation of Scripture<sup>101</sup> but also the reinterpretation of the entire theological system. Eventually, the acceptance of these presuppositions will lead to the reformulation of the entire body of Christian doctrines.

Adventist scientists, then, find themselves between two dogmatically received and contradictory traditions: evolutionary science (evolutionary method) and biblical theology (biblically grounded theological method). The inherent rational drive in humans pushes them to reach a harmonious unified understanding of truth. Eventually, to resolve the cognitive dissonance, one or both positions will be modified. Chances are that in this process scientists and scientifically oriented theologians will find it easier to modify theological teachings than to reconsider the evolutionary paradigm. To harmonize Adventism with evolutionary cosmology, some Adventist scholars may borrow the theological pattern used by classical and modern theologians described earlier in this article.

<sup>98</sup>Dulles, 146-147.

<sup>99</sup>Hayward, 11-15.

<sup>100</sup>Cf. Kuhn, 193.

<sup>101</sup>Richard M. Ritland, “Distribution of Life and the Creation of Biological Diversity,” in *Creation Reconsidered: Scientific, Biblical, and Theological Perspectives*, ed. James L. Hayward (Roseville, CA: Association of Adventist Forums, 2000), 141.

Adventist theology arose from the naive assumption that Scripture reveals things as they really are. By applying the historicist method of prophetic interpretation, the early Adventists not only became pioneers of "eschatological theology" a century before the writings of Wolfhart Pannenberg and Jürgen Moltmann, but they also departed from Platonic cosmology and the spiritual logic of Christian theology constructed by Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin. In fact, the doctrine of the Sanctuary, a pillar of Adventist theology, opened to view a complete system of theology and philosophy.<sup>102</sup> The theological change that took place in the first five years after the 1844 Great Disappointment implicitly changed the hermeneutical foundations Christian theologians had assumed thus far. Simply put, they implicitly assumed that God works his salvation within the spatiotemporal order of his creation through a historical process Adventists generally describe as the "Great Controversy." In Adventism, this historical process replaced the timeless, spiritual logic of classical and Protestant theologies. Moreover, Adventist theology is a radical challenge to the "systematicity" of classical and modern Christian theologies. As history reveals, this resulted from the close application of the *sola Scriptura* principle to the understanding of eschatology, salvation, and the whole system of theology.

In the Adventist theological system, the material condition of method is defined as the *sola Scriptura* principle and the macro-hermeneutical condition is understood temporally and historically instead of timelessly and spiritually. Thus, Gen 1-2 is not only the explanation of how the temporal stands on God as its ground, but also of how the history of God with his creatures revealed in Scripture began. In biblical thought, creation history not only explains the existence and design of nature, but the structure and dynamic of history as designed by God in its initial stage of perfection. The entire system of biblical theology works within the same historical understanding of reality and follows the same causal dynamics of interaction between Creator and creature. If creation week does not reveal how things actually happened, then there is not much reason to believe what it says about salvation or eschatology. If creation week did not take place, then there was neither a first couple perfectly created nor an origin of evil by disobedience to the historical order created by God. Then how are we to understand sin and redemption?

If the text is taken at face value, the temporal sequence of divine actions in Genesis cannot be isolated from its "theological" meaning

<sup>102</sup>According to Ellen White, "the subject of the sanctuary was the key which unlocked the mystery of the disappointment of 1844. It opened to view a complete system of truth, connected and harmonious, showing that God's hand had directed the great Advent movement, and revealing present duty as it brought to light the position and work of his people" (*Great Controversy*, 424). She also declares that Scripture "unfolds a simple and complete system of theology and philosophy" (*Education* [Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1952], 106).

without in some way superimposing on the text the timeless notion of God. For instance, Calvin suggested that the sequence of days in Genesis shows how good a provider God is. However, the text reveals much more, including, among others, the high complexity of God's creative work, the spatiotemporal level in which the creation process took place, and the way in which God brought our planet into existence. As is true of the entire Bible, in the history of creation God appears not as a timeless, spiritual entity unrelated to space and time, but directly involved and moving within the concrete spatiotemporal order of causes. Scripture contradicted Platonic cosmology before Plato invented it. Thus, the historical-theological understanding of Gen 1-2 is more necessary to explain the origin of human history and Christian theology than to provide a scientific account of origins of the natural realm. A historical-theological understanding of Gen 1-2 focuses on God's powerful historical process of interconnected creative acts. Adventism cannot change the history of creation without pulling from under its feet the foundation upon which it stands. Without this foundation, the doctrine of the Sanctuary and the historical interpretation of prophecy become literary exercises that do not help us to understand either nature or God's works of salvation. Evolutionary theory destroys the biblical history of salvation as a redemptive process that moves from creation to new creation.

In conclusion, evolutionary theory challenges much more than the deep historical-theological meaning of Gen 1-2. It calls for a wholesale deconstruction and reinterpretation of the fundamental principles of Adventist theology and the rejection of the historical understanding of salvation as presented in Scripture. Accommodation to evolutionary history implies rejecting and replacing the theological revolution from which Adventism originated. In turn, the community will lose the uniqueness that is its reason for existing. Adventists need to consider these points carefully before harmonizing Seventh-day Adventist beliefs with evolutionary patterns and history.

This report on method clearly indicates that the "scientific" status of evolutionary theory should not intimidate Adventist theologians into accommodating the scriptural view of history to the evolutionary view of history. Epistemologically speaking, evolutionary theory is a hypothetical, methodologically and culturally conditioned, historical metanarrative still in need of harmonizing with its data and in need of corroboration. We should recognize its rationality (power of explanation), but by no means feel that we are rationally or methodologically bound to accept it. Alternative explanations to evolutionary theory are always rationally and scientifically possible.

If, on the other hand, Adventists decide to harmonize biblical thought on the origins of life on this planet with the theory of evolution, we should be aware that what we are proposing is not a

minor exegetical change in our understanding of Gen 1. Instead, we will be introducing a radical paradigm shift in theological methodology. Sweeping changes in the implicit material and hermeneutical conditions of the theological method will generate changes permeating the entire Adventist system of theology<sup>103</sup> and practice.

Harmonization of the biblical doctrine of creation with evolutionary theory necessarily requires a methodological departure in the material condition of theological methodology. The Roman Catholic and Protestant methodological conviction that God reveals himself through multiple sources that include the shifting sand of philosophical and scientific teachings will replace the traditional Adventist conviction that theological truth builds on the *sola Scriptura* principle. Harmonization also involves radical changes in the hermeneutical condition of method. For instance, a spiritual, nonhistorical pattern of divine activity conceived from philosophical sources replaces the biblical historical pattern of divine activity central to the Adventist notion of the Great Controversy. Changes in the material and hermeneutical conditions of Adventist theological methodology will unleash a new way of understanding Scripture. A new Adventist theology will replace that of the early Adventists.<sup>104</sup>

The notion that we should blend evolution and creation into one single explanation that somehow merges the main contributions of both implies, at least, the conviction that Scripture does not provide the correct understanding of the origin of the world. The proponents of harmonization are convinced that science needs to mend what Scripture teaches. This implication entails a methodological shift of gigantic

<sup>103</sup>By "Adventist system of theology," I mean the theological system that the Sanctuary doctrine opened to the eyes of the Adventist pioneers (White, *Great Controversy*, 423). White has theologically formulated this system of truth throughout her writings and the Seventh-day Adventist Church has summarized its more salient components in its 27 Fundamental Beliefs.

<sup>104</sup>This harmonization will bring radical changes in Adventism similar to those Ellen White envisioned had Kellogg's pantheistic ideas found a home in Adventism. Consider her words as a description of the far-reaching implications that radical changes in theological method will entail for Adventism: "The enemy of souls has sought to bring in the supposition that a great reformation was to take place among Seventh-day Adventists, and that this reformation would consist in giving up the doctrines which stand as the pillars of our faith, and engaging in a process of reorganization. Were this reformation to take place, what would result? The principles of truth that God in His wisdom has given to the remnant church, would be discarded. Our religion would be changed. The fundamental principles that have sustained the work for the last fifty years would be accounted as error. A new organization would be established. Books of a new order would be written. A system of intellectual philosophy would be introduced. The founders of this system would go into the cities, and do a wonderful work. The Sabbath of course, would be lightly regarded, as also the God who created it. Nothing would be allowed to stand in the way of the new movement. The leaders would teach that virtue is better than vice, but God being removed, they would place their dependence on human power, which, without God, is worthless. Their foundation would be built on the sand, and storm and tempest would sweep away the structure" (*Selected Messages*, 1:204-205).

proportions. Harmonizing creation and evolution<sup>105</sup> inescapably leads to the abandonment of the *sola-tota-prima Scriptura* principle.<sup>106</sup> If science can correct Scripture's views on origins, it can also correct it in any area where scientific and theological discourses overlap. Finally, any attempt at harmonization calls for a radical change in the understanding of the divine revelation and inspiration of Scripture.<sup>107</sup>

If this way of thinking about the sources of Christian theology becomes accepted, Adventist theology will not be able to maintain its critical stance against tradition. After all, what is today called "tradition," former generations called science. In classical times, science was philosophy containing a Neoplatonic cosmology whose guidance led Christian theologians to the classical version of Christianity still found ruling in Roman Catholic<sup>108</sup> and Protestant evangelical theologies today.<sup>109</sup> In modern and postmodern times, the same methodological dynamic is at work. Empirical science containing an evolutionary

<sup>105</sup>The reader should bear in mind I am speaking of harmonizing evolution as a theory of science with creation as a systematic doctrine. I am not speaking, for instance, of harmonizing the Genesis story of creation with geological data or vice versa as Fritz Guy does ("Genesis and Geology," 297). After all, to try to harmonize geological data with the creation story is the same thing that evolutionists do when they continually attempt to harmonize geological data with evolutionary theory. To harmonize the biblical story from the geological data is impossible. Data mean nothing without a theory. Therefore, to harmonize biblical data to geology is to accommodate Scripture to a scientific theory, not to scientific data. To search for the meaning of the geological data from the perspective of biblical-creation cosmology is a scientific enterprise that works within all the characteristics and limitations of scientific methodology described in this paper. The only difference is that the hypothesis or theory being used to explain the data is not drawn from human imagination, but from the biblical record. To try to harmonize or interpret Genesis from geology is a problem of exegesis that uses an extrabiblical assumption to interpret the data of Scripture. Obviously, the problem facing theology is the attempt to harmonize two opposite cosmogonies and cosmologies. Though a synthesis between creation and evolution is certainly possible (e.g., Teilhard de Chardin's synthesis in his *El fenómeno humano* [Paris: Taurus, 1955]), it always implies considerable modification in one or both of the competing cosmologies.

<sup>106</sup>"The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to man the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history" (Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 4).

<sup>107</sup>Implicitly, those who seek harmonization between the teachings of evolutionary science and Christian theology seem to recognize this much. See, e.g., Cottrell, 195-221.

<sup>108</sup>Bonsor, 6, states: "The philosophical environment of the early church was dominated by forms of Platonism. These philosophical perspectives provided a rich source for Christian revelation, a source that continues to enlighten revealed truth."

<sup>109</sup>See, e.g., Donald G. Bloesch, *God the Almighty: Power, Wisdom, Holiness, Love*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995), 208-211.

cosmology<sup>110</sup> leads to a process-theology version of Christianity. Ultimately, these radical changes in the material and hermeneutical principles of Adventist theology will cause changes throughout the entire system of Adventist theology.

Harmonizing Scripture to evolution, then, requires the harmonization of the Adventist theological method to the always-changing dictates of human science and tradition. In turn, methodological changes will require a reformulation of the entire corpus of Adventist doctrine and, eventually, the reformulation of all 27 fundamental beliefs. Before seeking harmonization between the creation and evolution metanarratives, then, Adventists should seriously think whether they are willing to give up the very reason for their existence as a church.<sup>111</sup>

### *The Task Ahead*

Adventism has grown in numbers and institutions. In spite of the proliferation of church-sponsored universities around the world, at the beginning of the twenty-first century the intellectual frontier remains mostly unconquered territory. The issue of evolution is one of the many intellectual challenges Adventists have to meet as they pass their beliefs from one generation to the next and share the Three Angels' Messages with the world. Intellectual challenges must be met with intellectual weapons and solutions. Because Adventism has a practical and missionary bent, it has been slow to recognize intellectual challenges from within and without the

<sup>110</sup>The more influential version of evolutionary cosmology is process philosophy, pioneered by Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, Gifford Lecture Series, 1927-1928 (New York: Macmillan, 1960). The ontological dualism of Platonism, Neo-Platonism, and classical Christian theology still survive in process philosophy, but are greatly softened and diffused into a plurality of levels. Diffused ontological dualistic levels of reality are apparent, e.g., in the so-called "panexperientialism with organizational duality" (Ian G. Barbour, *Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues* [San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997], 288). This view applies specifically to anthropological dualism. David Jay Griffin explains: "This doctrine provides the basis for a position that avoids Cartesian dualism while still affirming a distinction between the soul and the brain, a distinction that affirms the reality of human freedom and the possibility of life after death" ("Process Theology and the Christian Good News: A Response to Classical Free Will Theism," in *Searching for an Adequate God*, ed. John B. Cobb Jr. and Clark H. Pinnock [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], 4). For an introduction to Teilhard de Chardin's and John Cobb's versions of evolutionary process theology, see Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *20th Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992], 130-144).

<sup>111</sup>White comments: "But God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms. The opinions of learned men, the deductions of science, the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, as numerous and discordant as are the churches which they represent, the voice of the majority—not one nor all of these should be regarded as evidence for or against any point of religious faith. Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain 'Thus saith the Lord' in its support" (*The Great Controversy*, 595).

church. Those involved in intellectual activities within the church should search for solutions fostering further understanding of truth and for strengthening the unity and mission of the church.

This brief review of the epistemological structure of scientific and theological methodologies has argued that the authority science presently enjoys as the undisputed source and arbiter of truth is disproportionate with the powers of reason and the conditions under which scientific methodology operates. We should respect the seriousness with which scientists do their job. Yet, their findings should not be considered as divine oracles. Adventists should develop a true scientific spirit that begins by doubting what we receive from both scientific and theological traditions. We should apply doubt in both science and theology. Yet doubt should lead us back to the data, not to a subjective selection of theories that we like better. For instance, some are critical of biblical theology because, for them, other theories exhibit a higher power of explanation. Therefore, they use what is persuasive to them to criticize even Scripture itself. Instead, all theories should be tested by the appropriate data—Adventist theology by the biblical data and scientific discovery and explanation by empirical data.

For example, those who find evolution persuasive, use it to criticize biblical beliefs and harmonize them to evolution. This “critical” approach is not scientific because it does not generate from the things themselves.<sup>112</sup> Scientific criticism leads the researcher back to the sources, to the things themselves. For example, scientific criticism in paleontology should lead back to the fossils themselves; scientific criticism in theology should lead back to Scripture. In going to “the things themselves,” the researcher makes a conscious choice to suspend belief in previously received theories, in order to see whether better ones could be created that would hold a higher power of explanation. Science operates in this way. Researchers should not so much reflect others’ theories, but in faithfulness to the appropriate data, they should create their own theories and explanations.

The task before Adventist theologians is not easy. It implies that they should forget the way many have recently been doing theology (by cutting and pasting from the work of non-Adventist theologians), in order to return to “the things themselves.” In theology, the “things themselves” are the data. For Adventist theology committed to the *sola*

<sup>112</sup>Martin Heidegger states: “The real ‘movement’ of the sciences takes place when their basic concepts undergo a more or less radical revision which is transparent to itself. The level which a science has reached is determined by how far it is *capable* of a crisis in its basic concepts. In such immanent crises the very relationship between positively investigative inquiry and those things themselves that are under interrogation comes to a point where it begins to totter. Among the various disciplines everywhere today there are freshly awakened tendencies to put research on new foundations” (*Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Collins, 1962), 29 n. 9; see also his definition of phenomenology (*ibid.*, 58, n. 34).

*Scriptura* principle, the “things themselves” are the words of Scripture.<sup>113</sup>

This is especially pertinent to the theory of evolution, because scientific tradition has sided with a theory that directly contradicts the inner logic of Scripture and the entire system of Adventist beliefs. But both scientific and theological methodologies call for better approaches. Adventist scholars need to produce alternative theological and scientific explanations.<sup>114</sup> It is no longer sufficient to merely reshuffle the old.

The starting point is to agree on the material condition of theological methodology. If we depart from the *sola Scriptura* principle there is no hope for theological unity in Adventism. If Adventism accepts evolution as the correct way for understanding the question of origins, it simultaneously exchanges one foundational macro-hermeneutical principle of biblical and theological interpretation for another. As such, evolution will cause Adventists either to modify their theological understanding of fundamental beliefs or to change the statement itself. From agreement on the material condition of theological methodology, we should come to an agreement on the hermeneutical condition; especially, the way in which we understand the being of God, humans, and the world.

This report on method suggests that we should give attention to the way in which the intellectual positions challenging the church are generated. Many lack the necessary tools to face scientific, theological, and philosophical theories that conflict with biblical positions. This lack of familiarity with methodological issues may explain why many feel the need for harmonizing with ideas incompatible with biblical revelation. If Adventists would become more familiar with the characteristics and limitations of scientific method, they might not feel so “rationally” compelled to harmonize biblical thought with scientific or theological theories. There is a need to demythologize science and philosophy in Adventist education. We can do this by allowing new generations of Adventist students to become acquainted with philosophical and scientific epistemologies.

This study on method also suggests that Adventism should give serious study to the method through which it reaches theological

<sup>113</sup>As for science, the “things themselves” are the data on which its theories stand. In theology the “things themselves” are the revelation of God that Adventists, together with all Christians, find in the words of Scripture. That words can be understood scientifically as “things themselves” becomes clear when Hans-Georg Gadamer explains: “All correct interpretation must be on guard against arbitrary fancies and the limitations imposed by imperceptible habits of thought, and it must direct its gaze ‘on the things themselves’ (which, in the case of the literary critic, are meaningful texts, which themselves are again concerned with objects). For the interpreter to let himself be guided by the things themselves is obviously not a matter of a single, ‘conscientious’ decision, but is ‘the first, last, and constant task’” (*Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2d rev. ed. [New York: Continuum, 1989], 266-267).

<sup>114</sup>In science, see, e.g., Leonard Brand, “The Integration of Faith and Science,” *JATS* 14/1 (2003): 121-137. In theology, see, e.g., Gully.

conclusions. Due to the worldwide nature of the Adventist Church, the proliferation of universities around the world, and the consequent tendency to theological fragmentation, it is imperative that theological methodology and its material, teleological, and hermeneutical conditions are not borrowed from other schools of theology. Creative work is necessary to express the Adventist message and theological system at the highest intellectual level without distortion. This will prepare new generations of Adventists who are capable not only of understanding biblical revelation in its inner historical logic, but who are also capable of communicating it to a secular and postmodern society.

Adventists also need to grasp the inner historical coherence or logic of biblical thought that the early Adventists discovered, but which is beginning to be lost with the passing of time. The complete system of theology and philosophy contained in Scripture, which the doctrine of the Sanctuary opened to view, is still there for us to discover anew. At this point, we need to remember again that the lure of evolution revolves around its "explanatory power," not in its "factuality." If an entire generation of Adventists around the world could recapture the explanatory power of biblical thinking, the explanatory power of evolution would begin to lose its grip on the minds of many inside and outside the church.

This, of course, will not exempt Adventists from doing the required thinking—fossil by fossil, assumption by assumption, experiment by experiment—as we search for a better understanding of our world and in testing the beliefs that we have received. As all believers should do theology for themselves by going and personally studying the data of biblical revelation, so Adventist scientists should also go back to the data which evolutionary theory explains to seek for better explanations in the light of Scripture.

Scientists who dogmatically believe in evolution are not likely to change their theory any time soon. After all, the material condition of their methodology requires that they seek for an explanation considering only empirical evidence. However, those who understand the power of explanation of evolutionary theory should not forget that not everything in scientific method originates from empirical data. Scientific and evolutionary methodologies also include all-inclusive hermeneutical a priori, presuppositions that cannot be empirically corroborated. Thus, there is a legitimate way to apply scientific methodology from a biblically originated hermeneutical a priori. Some Adventist scientists are already working from this hermeneutical perspective. For them, the Gen 1, seven-day, historical process God used to create life on our planet becomes a cosmological a priori, hermeneutically conditioning their hypotheses, their explanations of known data, and their search for fresh new evidence. The task is difficult and no single individual will finish it in his or her lifetime. Yet, we cannot give up, because to function as human rational beings we need to assume a working cosmology. The cosmology Adventists choose will determine the

content of our rationality, the hermeneutical condition of our scientific and theological methodologies, our biblical interpretation, the shape of our theology, and the mission of the church.

The study of method indicates that we need to consider the question of theological sources carefully. Will we still build on the *sola Scriptura* principle? What do we mean by revelation and inspiration? The answers we give to these questions will determine the way in which we will define our macro-hermeneutical presuppositions. Will we choose to define them from Scripture alone or from science and philosophy? If we choose the former, then we cannot define our cosmology by accommodating our theology to evolution. If we choose the latter, we will. What macro-hermeneutical principles will we use to probe into the inner logic of Christian theology? If we choose to retrieve them from Scripture, then we will see what the early Adventists saw. If we define them from science and philosophy, then we will see what Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin saw.

Should we be loyal to biblical revelation?—or to theological tradition, scientific theory, and philosophical doctrines? In postmodern times, we can hardly deposit our faith in a human tradition that has no foundation.<sup>115</sup> Christian theology has its foundation in the divine, historical revelation found in the pages of Scripture.<sup>116</sup> From this revealed source, we should define our methodology, discover the inner logic of Scripture, and construct the teachings of the church for the present time. Personally, I find that the epistemological analysis of theological and scientific methodologies helps me to better understand the intellectual world in which I live and the intellectual task confronting Christ's disciples in postmodern times.

Finally, does acceptance of biblical history of a six-day creation imply the sacrifice of intellect? Our report on method suggests it does not. On the contrary, it calls for exercising intellect to the fullest, while there are many who dogmatically uphold either creation or evolution without thinking, but simply on the basis of biblical or scientific authority. As we have suggested, faith stands on interpretations. Thus, to avoid believing a lie, every believer needs to thoroughly investigate his or her own intellectual beliefs.

There is no doubt that scientists have taken their work seriously when building their explanations. Evolutionary theory is a complex construction that involves and interlinks with many theories in many fields using various rational and technological procedures. Nevertheless, evolution is not a fact but a theory that reconstructs a past event that forever remains outside of our empirical experience. From the side of its teleological condition, evolutionary science is historical and therefore differs radically from the

<sup>115</sup>For an introduction to the rejection of the modern epistemological foundationalism, see, e.g., Stanley Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

<sup>116</sup>Cf. Canale, *Back to Revelation-Inspiration*, 1-26.

method of empirical science. Outcomes in empirical sciences are theories corroborated by way of deduction and experiment. In the case of evolutionary theory, no such corroboration is possible. In historical science, corroboration is weaker than in the empirical sciences because corroboration is limited to the implications of inner consistency and explanatory power. Evolutionists are still working on the inner consistency of their theory. Empirical corroboration, however, of both creation and evolutionary theories is possible eschatologically. With the passing of time, either a new biological organism will develop from a lower form of life or the biblical Creator will recreate the earth with the same power and procedures involved in the original creation of our planet and the universe. Meanwhile, for practical reasons we need to assume a cosmology to make sense of our lives and the uses of our rational powers. This implies that we must choose one of several rational alternatives. The biblical history of creation is a rational alternative revealed by God. Its divine origin does not diminish its rationality; it only places it outside of the options which scientific methodology allows us to imagine.

The adage "all truth is God's truth" sounds good, but it is not very helpful. Many use it as a shortcut to argue for the underlying harmony between theology and science in God's mind. Of course, one cannot easily apply it to solve the creation-evolution debate because theological and scientific methods do not produce truth as it is in God but only human interpretations and constructions. Moreover, since science does not recognize God, we can scarcely say that it produces God's truth. To imply that science produces God's truth when it does not consider him, confers to reason a power that epistemology does not recognize.

In the final analysis, both theology and science attempt to explain reality as a whole. By using reason and method, they produce coherent and persuasive explanations that can be accepted on the basis of faith in their foundations. Some place their confidence in divine revelation. Others choose to follow the dictates of human imagination and research. Reason and faith are active and at work in both theological and scientific methodologies. That there is a conflict of interpretations between science and Christian theology constructed on the *sola Scriptura* principle should not surprise Adventists who believe in the Great Controversy.

As protagonists in this ongoing controversy, we should face competing theological, scientific, and cultural explanations with a twofold strategy: by maximizing the weakness of competing views and by further exploring the inner coherence and explanatory power of biblical teaching. This requires that Adventists take the intellectual side of their faith seriously. Perhaps we can rekindle the passion for biblical truth that brought our pioneers together and come to see the same complete and harmonious system of theology and philosophy that originated the Adventist Church. Faithfulness to God requires no less.

### *Conclusion*

After a three-article series on method we can now look back on the broad questions that motivated our reflections.<sup>117</sup> How do we arrive at conclusions? We arrive at theological and scientific conclusions by using reason and method. How do we arrive at truth? We arrive at truth by faith in our conclusions. In other words, reason and method, both in theology and science, allow for conception and formulation of various, even contradictory conclusions that are equally rational and scientific. Science and theology are interpretations. Neither reason nor method are miraculous tools producing absolute truth equally persuasive to all human beings at all times. However, we need truth. Therefore, we choose as truth the conclusions that are most persuasive to us. When we adopt them by faith, they become truth for us. Scientists deposit their faith in the explanatory strength of rationality and methodology. Adventists have deposited their faith in the explanations presented by God in Scripture. Creation and evolution are conflicting metanarratives explaining the origins of human life and history. From the perspective of science, harmonization with creation is impossible because God is not a factor recognized by scientific methodology (i.e., material condition and index of reality).

Theologically, harmonization is possible. Traditions whose theologies recognize multiple sources of divine revelation and define their hermeneutical principles from philosophy and science accommodate evolution to their beliefs. In the process, philosophy and science become sources of theology that define the macro-hermeneutical principles of theological methodology. In this way, Platonic cosmology came to shape the inner, timeless spiritual logic of Roman Catholic and Protestant theologies, because, when theology does not engage the spatiotemporal level, the possibility of conflicts between theology and science disappears. If conflict arises, however, theology is methodologically required to harmonize whatever is demanded by developments in one of its sources. For this reason, most systems of Christian theology can coexist with the doctrine of evolution without changing their inner logic and teachings. This is not the case with Adventist theology. Its beliefs cannot harmonize with evolutionary theory without forfeiting the inner historical logic of biblical thinking on which they stand and without reinterpreting the entire range of its fundamental beliefs.

In what way is the Bible the foundation of truth? The answer to this question depends on one's views on revelation-inspiration and on the material condition of theological method (i.e., the sources of theology). At the present time, Adventists disagree on these issues. However, Adventists believe that "the Holy Scriptures [Old and New Testaments] are the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer

<sup>117</sup>Canale, "Evolution, Theology and Method, Part I," 65-100.

of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history" (Fundamental Belief 1).<sup>118</sup> On this basis, Scripture becomes the source of true explanation because it has an unmovable origin, God. Revelation, rather than reason, is the source of explanation and truth for those who believe in God and his revelation in Scripture. The Bible's words and inner logic, however, still need interpretation. That is why we need to place all Christian theologies, including Adventist theologies, under careful methodological criticism to make certain we understand biblical thinking on its own terms and not from hermeneutical presuppositions defined by philosophy, science, and culture. Only then can we say in practice that the Bible is the foundation of truth. Truth, then, stands on God's special revelation<sup>119</sup> in Scripture, reached by rational understanding, and embraced in the commitment of faith.

I hope that this brief report on method will help theologians, pastors, scientists, and lay persons to become familiar with the intellectual scenario behind the creation-evolution clash of interpretations in order to better understand the challenges before us and to devise appropriate plans to face these challenges in intellectual integrity and faithfulness to biblical revelation.

<sup>118</sup>General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 4.

<sup>119</sup>"Special revelation" refers to Scripture in contradistinction to "general revelation" of God in nature. General revelation should not be confused with natural theology. The former is a divine activity in producing and administering the natural realm the latter is a human interpretation of what people think nature is and points beyond itself.