Sin leads to death and is the root cause of death. And when sin is expunged from the universe, death will, as a result, be no more. Add a definition and you have “transgression of the law is the root cause of death.” And that makes obedience a fundamental condition of continuing life. Adventism carries within its doctrines a profound answer to the “why” questions, an explanation of how the Law is related to bliss.

Theistic evolution confuses this picture. With predation happening prior to the emergence of intelligence, death becomes the result of Divine will. The weight of guilt and horror that should fall squarely on transgressors is shifted. Sin loses its place as the cause of death. The law loses its luster as a means of preserving the peace. God appears guilty of causing senseless misery.

Indeed, confusion regarding God’s part in causing senseless misery moved Darwin.

ADVENTISTS AFFIRM is no science journal. Our denominational scientists have produced excellent treatments of the question of origins from a scientific perspective. But in this issue, the first to be published since I became editor, the Biblical data regarding origins gets more attention.

Sean Pitman, a vocal critic of theistic evolution, has come to the fore in the recent discussions regarding the teaching of evolution at La Sierra University. In “Turtles All the Way Up” he discusses how cosmologists have found abundant evidence for design even in the calibrated nature of the laws of physics. What they lack, he points out, is the side of the story provided by scripture. They do not know that the Super-Intelligence has the heart of a loving Father.

Ellen White’s article in this issue, in the typical succinct approach that characterizes prophets of all ages, speaks on the topic of creation:

Inferences erroneously drawn from facts observed in nature have, however, led to supposed conflict between science and revelation; and in the effort to restore harmony, interpretations of Scripture have been adopted that undermine and destroy the force of the word of God.

The passage reminds me of 2 Peter 3 where one may find a two thousand year old prophecy that in the end of time persons would be “willingly” “ignorant” of a six-day creation and world-wide flood. This prophecy of the timing of theistic evolution astounds me. I say “theistic” because the scoffers of the chapter say “all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.” 2Peter 3:3-7.

Christina Harris has authored a thought provoking article on the impossibilities of chemical evolution. She proposes that we keep asking questions that will remind the world that the scientific question of origins is not yet adequately resolved. She suggests, “Which came first, DNA or the proteins needed by DNA—which can only be produced by DNA?” and “Is it possible that similarities in design between different animals prove a common Creator instead of a common ancestor?”
How well can Adventism blend with evolutionary theory is both a Biblical question and a philosophical one. Fernando Canale shows that long ages philosophically undermine the core concepts of the Adventist people.

And that is the truth.

The first angel’s message, timed to coincide with the 1844 opening of the judgment, draws the attention of the world to the facts of creation.

The second angel’s message announced Babylon’s crime of intoxicating the world with falsehoods. And it is mystic Babylon today that leads the religious world in promoting a theory of theistic evolution that denies the creation story of the first angel’s message.

The message of the sealing writes the creation story into the hearts of believers with the weekly memorial of the Sabbath.

And our Advent hope rests in the creative power of God to change our vile bodies in a moment.

Indeed, the everlasting gospel leads men to depends on God’s creative power. “If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature.”

Our message regarding the state of man in death is based on a literal reading of the Genesis story where man becomes a living soul by receiving the breath of life.

The moral absolutes that govern mankind take the Genesis story as history. A spiritualizing of that story mitigates the absolute nature of the Ten Commandments.

And what about evangelism? The articles in this edition have a common thread. Three of them are written by persons who grew up with an interest in science and without a knowledge of Adventism. This is the class that we think to win through science savvy. But none of these three were won that way. They became creationists through the study of scripture.

Pastor Mike Taylor brings out how, in reading Genesis 1, he was struck with the simple thought that beauty in nature matches the predictions one would make from Genesis 1. (For beauty in nature, though often useful in a biological sense, generally outstrips its biological usefulness. And so Darwin was sickened at the sight of a peacock’s plume.)

Dr. Plaisted shares results of his research into how ancient authorities viewed the historicity of the flood story. Good evidence exists that centuries before the time of Christ, several of the great developing cultures made reference to an epic-size flood.

**ADVENTISTS AFFIRM** that God created the Bible in six days and rested the seventh and was refreshed. And we affirm so much more that depends on that first affirmation. The gospel that should go to the world must include this element of God’s creative power. And so this edition of **ADVENTISTS AFFIRM**, makes its contribution.

May we be faithful to the truths that were written with God’s finger.

1See Origins, by Ariel Roth (1998, Review and Herald Publishing Association); and Faith, Reason, and Earth History, by Leonard Brand (1997, Andrews University Press). Both of these books rise above many of their genre by showing respect for the research and intelligence of persons that believe in evolution. You would not need to be embarrassed to have your secular scientifically gifted uncle read them.
Since the book of nature and the book of revelation bear the impress of the same master mind, they cannot but speak in harmony. By different methods, and in different languages, they witness to the same great truths. Science is ever discovering new wonders; but she brings from her research nothing that, rightly understood, conflicts with divine revelation. The book of nature and the written word shed light upon each other. They make us acquainted with God by teaching us something of the laws through which He works.

Inferences erroneously drawn from facts observed in nature have, however, led to supposed conflict between science and revelation; and in the effort to restore harmony, interpretations of Scripture have been adopted that undermine and destroy the force of the word of God. Geology has been thought to contradict the literal interpretation of the Mosaic record of the creation. Millions of years, it is claimed, were required for the evolution of the earth from chaos; and in order to accommodate the Bible to this supposed revelation of science, the days of creation are assumed to have been vast, indefinite periods, covering thousands or even millions of years.

Such a conclusion is wholly uncalled for. The Bible record is in harmony with itself and with the teaching of nature. Of the first day employed in the work of creation is given the record, "The evening and the morning were the first day." Genesis 1:5. And the same in substance is said of each of the first six days of creation week. Each of these periods Inspiration declares to have been a day consisting of evening and morning, like every other day since that time. In regard to the work of creation itself the divine testimony is, "He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast." Psalm 33:9. With Him who could thus call into existence unnumbered worlds, how long a time would be required for the evolution of the earth from chaos? In order to account for His works, must we do violence to His word?

It is true that remains found in the earth testify to the existence of men, animals, and plants much larger than any now known. These are regarded as proving the existence of vegetable and animal life prior to the time of the Mosaic record. But concerning these things Bible history furnishes ample explanation. Before the Flood the development of vegetable and animal life was immeasurably superior to that which has since been known. At the Flood the surface of the earth was broken up, marked changes took place, and in the re-formation of the earth's crust were preserved many evidences of the life previously existing. The vast forests buried in the earth at the time of the Flood, and since changed to coal, form the extensive coal fields, and yield the supplies of oil that minister to our comfort and convenience today. These things, as they are brought to light, are so many witnesses mutely testifying to the truth of the word of God.

Akin to the theory concerning the evolution of the earth is that which attributes to an ascending line of germs, mollusks, and quadrupeds the evolution of man, the crowning glory of the creation. When consideration is given to man's opportunities for research; how brief his life; how limited his sphere of action; how
restricted his vision; how frequent and how great the errors in his conclusions, especially as concerns the
events thought to antedate Bible history; how often the supposed deductions of science are revised or
cast aside; with what readiness the assumed period of the earth's development is from time to time
increased or diminished by millions of years;
and how the theories advanced by different scientists conflict with one another,—considering all this,
shall we, for the privilege of tracing our descent from germs and mollusks and apes, consent to cast
away that statement of Holy
Writ, so grand in its simplicity, "God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He
him"? Genesis 1:27. Shall we reject that genealogical record,—prouder than any treasured in the courts
of kings,—"which was the
son of Adam, which was the son of God"? Luke 3:38.

Rightly understood, both the revelations of science and the experiences of life are in harmony with the
testimony of Scripture to the constant working of God in nature.

In the hymn recorded by Nehemiah, the Levites sang, "Thou, even Thou, art Lord alone; Thou hast made
heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas,
and all that is therein, and Thou preservest them all." Nehemiah 9:6.

As regards this earth, Scripture declares the work of creation to have been completed. "The works were
finished from the foundation of the world." Hebrews 4:3.

But the power of God is still exercised in upholding the objects of His creation. It is not because the
mechanism once set in motion continues to act by its own inherent energy that the pulse beats, and
breath follows breath. Every breath, every pulsation of the heart, is an evidence of the care of Him in
whom we live and move and have our being. From the smallest insect to man, every living creature is
daily dependent upon His providence.

"These wait all upon Thee. ...
That Thou givest them they gather:
Thou openest Thine hand, they are filled with good.
Thou hidest Thy face, they are troubled:
Thou takest away their breath, they die,
And return to their dust.
Thou sendest forth Thy Spirit, they are created:
And Thou renewest the face of the earth." Psalm 104:27-30.

"He stretcheth out the north over the empty place,
And hangeth the earth upon nothing.
He bindeth up the waters in His thick clouds;
And the cloud is not rent under them. ...
He hath compassed the waters with bounds,
Until the day and night come to an end."

"The pillars of heaven tremble
And are astonished at His rebuke.
He stilleth the sea with His power. ...
By His Spirit the heavens are beauty;
His hand hath pierced the gliding serpent.
Lo, these are but the outskirts of His ways:
And how small a whisper do we hear of Him!
But the thunder of His power who can understand?"
Job 26:7-10; 26:11-14, R.V., margin.

"The Lord hath His way in the whirlwind and in the storm,
And the clouds are the dust of His feet." Nahum 1:3.

The mighty power that works through all nature and sustains all things is not, as some men of science
claim, merely an all-pervading principle, an actuating energy.
God is a spirit; yet He is a personal being, for man was made in His image. As a personal being, God has revealed Himself in His Son. Jesus, the outshining of the Father's glory, “and the express image of His person” (Hebrews 1:3), was on earth found in fashion as a man. As a personal Savior He came to the world. As a personal Savior He ascended on high. As a personal Savior He intercedes in the heavenly courts. Before the throne of God in our behalf ministers “One like the Son of man.” Daniel 7:13.

The apostle Paul, writing by the Holy Spirit, declares of Christ that “all things have been created through Him, and unto Him; and He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.” Colossians 1:16,17, R.V., margin. The hand that sustains the worlds in space, the hand that holds in their orderly arrangement and tireless activity all things throughout the universe of God, is the hand that was nailed to the cross for us.

The greatness of God is to us incomprehensible. “The Lord’s throne is in heaven” (Psalm 11:4); yet by His Spirit He is everywhere present. He has an intimate knowledge of, and a personal interest in, all the works of His hand.

“Who is like unto the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high, Who humbleth Himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth!”

“Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there: If I make my bed in the grave (see Psalm 139:8, R.V.; Job 26:6, R.V., margin), behold, Thou art there. “If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall Thy hand lead me, And Thy right hand shall hold me.” Psalms 113:5, 6; 139:7-10. “Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, Thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou searchest out my path and my lying down, And art acquainted with all my ways. ... Thou hast beset me behind and before, And laid Thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot attain unto it.” Psalm 139:2-6, R.V.

It was the Maker of all things who ordained the wonderful adaptation of means to end, of supply to need. It was He who in the material world provided that every desire implanted should be met. It was He who created the human soul, with its capacity for knowing and for loving. And He is not in Himself such as to leave the demands of the soul unsatisfied. No intangible principle, no impersonal essence or mere abstraction, can satisfy the needs and longings of human beings in this life of struggle with sin and sorrow and pain. It is not enough to believe in law and force, in things that have no pity, and never hear the cry for help. We need to know of an almighty arm that will hold us up, of an infinite Friend that pities us. We need to clasp a hand that is warm, to trust in a heart full of tenderness. And even so God has in His word revealed Himself.

He who studies most deeply into the mysteries of nature will realize most fully his own ignorance and weakness. He will realize that there are depths and heights which he cannot reach, secrets which he cannot penetrate, vast fields of truth lying before him unentered. He will be ready to say, with Newton, “I seem to myself to have been like a child on the seashore finding pebbles and shells, while the great ocean of truth lay undiscovered before me.”

The deepest students of science are constrained to recognize in nature the working of infinite power. But
to man's unaided reason, nature's teaching cannot but be contradictory and disappointing. Only in the light of revelation can it be read aright. "Through faith we understand." Hebrews 11:3.

"In the beginning God." Genesis 1:1. Here alone can the mind in its eager questioning, fleeing as the dove to the ark, find rest. Above, beneath, beyond, abides Infinite Love, working out all things to accomplish "the good pleasure of His goodness." 2 Thessalonians 1:11.

"The invisible things of Him since the creation of the world are ... perceived through the things that are made, even His everlasting power and divinity." Romans 1:20, R.V. But their testimony can be understood only through the aid of the divine Teacher. "What man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God." 1 Corinthians 2:11.

"When He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth." John 16:13. Only by the aid of that Spirit who in the beginning "was brooding upon the face of the waters;" of that Word by whom "all things were made;" of that "true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world," can the testimony of science be rightly interpreted. Only by their guidance can its deepest truths be discerned.

Only under the direction of the Omniscient One shall we, in the study of His works, be enabled to think His thoughts after Him.

Is Adventist Theology Compatible With Evolutionary Theory?

Fernando L. Canale

Can Adventism harmonize biblical creation to deep-time evolution without changing its essence?

Some assume that Adventist theology is compatible with deep-time evolutionary theory. For them, all it takes to harmonize evolution with Adventist theology is to interpret Genesis 1 theologically — that is, not literally. If we were to make such a small concession, they assert, Adventist theology and doctrines would not only remain unchanged but would also become relevant to those persuaded of the truthfulness of deep-time and evolutionary ideas. Adventism’s intellectual credibility would increase and broaden.

This view assumes that the deep-time theory of origins would not disturb the theological truths of Scripture or the Adventist theological system and fundamental beliefs. When it comes to the theological understanding of Creation, time would not be of the essence.

Yet, if scientific and methodological convictions caused Adventists to accept deep-time and evolutionary ideas as true, they would have to harmonize not only Genesis 1 but also the entire system of Adventist doctrines. Nothing would remain unchanged.

Those who assume that biblical creation and deep-time evolutionary theory are compatible forget that in biblical thinking, time is of the essence. God acts historically in human time and space. Biblical theology cannot fit the evolutionary version of historical development without losing its essence and truth. God’s works in history cannot follow evolutionary theory.

Any attempt to accommodate Adventist theology to deep-time/macro-evolutionary views must ensure that it upholds four principles: (1) It does not change the order of theological causes assumed in Scripture; (2) it does not change the biblical history of God’s acts; (3) it supports the pillars of the Adventist faith; and (4) it strengthens the historical understanding or redemption embedded in the sanctuary doctrine and the Great Controversy metanarrative.

Rewriting Biblical History Those who invite us to read Genesis 1 theologically must recognize that theological interpretations spring from our conception of God’s nature and His actions in created time. Usually, theological readings assume that “ultimate” reality is timeless, that God does not act within a historical sequence. Thus, historical events do not belong to what is properly theological. This is why for most Christian theologians the evolutionary rewriting of history does not affect theological (religious) contents, allowing them to separate the theological (religious) content of Genesis 1 (its truth) from its historical wrapping (the story). The six-day, 24-hour period and the historical process described in the text are dismissed as non-theological: God’s creative action is displaced from the historical to the spiritual realm.
Yet Adventists read Scripture from the biblical understanding of God’s being and actions. When they read the text theologically, they see God creating our planet in a historical sequence of six consecutive 24-hour days. This sequence forms part of the history of God, and, therefore, of the interpretation of Creation that the text conveys. It also forms part of the history of our planet. God is performing a divine act in a historical sequence within the flow of created time.

Harmonization of theology with evolution begins by accepting the evolutionary rewriting of the history of humankind. Paleontologists, geologists, and biologists claim to be describing the accurate story of historical realities. Because the Genesis story does not fit the facts as understood by evolutionists, some theologians seriously consider letting biblical history go. Because they accept that God’s act of creation does not take place in history, they classify the biblical history of Creation as myth or literary framework. Yet the inner logic of theological thinking articulated by God’s acts suggests that letting go of the biblical history of Creation entails letting go of the biblical history of redemption and end times.

For instance, theologians working from the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation apply the same evolutionary pattern to the entire sweep of biblical history. They are willing to let go not only of the history of Creation but also of the entirety of biblical history, particularly when it presents God acting historically within the process of human history. Therefore, we should not be surprised that this theological approach posits the new earth not to be historical but spiritual.

Spiritualizing Biblical Theology

Both theology and evolution revolve around reality and its causes. Genesis 1 explains the origin of the physical world as a historical sequence of divine creative acts in space and time. Evolution explains the origin of the same physical world by constructing a different history with different length, events, and causes. Clearly, the two historical scenarios cannot both be true. Thus, harmonization of biblical creation to evolution requires not only the acceptance of a different account of history but also a different understanding of God’s causal role in history. The centrality of this issue for theology cannot be overemphasized.

Theological consistency requires that once we adjust our view of how God relates to evolutionary theory, we will apply the same view throughout the entire range of human history. This brings us to a central issue in any theological harmonization of Genesis 1 to evolution, namely, divine causality in evolutionary theory. Theistic evolution and progressive creationism are the leading intermediate models to harmonize creation and evolution theologically. Both understand divine causality in evolutionary theory spiritually rather than historically.

Theistic Evolution. Teilhard de Chardin, a French Roman Catholic priest, imagines a system of theistic evolution in which God works from the inside of nature and history, not from the outside. God works as spiritual energy, which to animate evolution in its lower stages “could of course only act in an impersonal form and under the veil of biology.”¹ Thus, divine causality does not operate within history but as hidden energy from the realm of the spirit.

Progressive Creationism. Bernard Ramm, an American evangelical theologian, rejects theistic evolution because it springs from a pantheistic view of God. Instead, he suggests progressive creationism as the theory that is the “best accounting for all the facts — biological, geological, and biblical.”² He asserts that God created by a combination of instantaneous miraculous fiat creation and of a process of creation outside history. He suggests that several acts of flat creation have occurred through deep evolutionary time, which helps to clarify the gaps in evolutionary time, which helps to clarify the gaps in evolutionary theory that science cannot explain. Then, Ramm says, God “turns the task of creation over to the Holy Spirit who is inside Nature.”³ The Holy Spirit is seen as the energy that brings about the evolutionary side of God’s plan of creation.

According to these theories, God works out the events of natural and human history as reconstructed by the biological mechanism and laws of evolution. According to Scripture, however, God created our world by acting not from inside or outside history but from within its historical flow.

The difference between theistic evolution and progressive creationism consists in the way their proponents see God’s involvement in the process of evolution. Both, however, share the conviction that...
evolutionary science tells the true story of what actually took place in historical reality. Moreover, both views assume that God does not work historically within the sequence of historical events Divine causality does not operate historically (sequentially) but spiritually (instantaneously).

The way in which theistic evolution and progressive creationism deal with creation demonstrates that harmonizing biblical creation with deep-time evolutionary theory requires more than a theological interpretation of Genesis 1. God’s providential activities must also harmonize with evolutionary causal order so that it may fit the actual outcome of the biological mechanism of evolution.

A Conflict of Metanarratives
All systems of theological interpretation revolve on an inner logic that centers on the way theologians understand the being and actions of God. In theological method this conception behaves as an interpretative “template” shaping all theological ideas and doctrines of Scripture. Changes in the template of any theological system unleash changes in the understanding of its theological ideas, doctrines, and interpretations of Scripture. The template, then, ultimately controls whether we can integrate a new idea like evolution into the inner logic of the system of biblical theology.

Roman Catholicism and Protestantism share the same template form which they ground and develop their theologies. For them, the template is metaphysics, in which the notions of a timeless God, sovereign providence, and the immortal soul play a dominant role. Bernard Ramm recognized the defining role that this template plays in the task of his progressive creation model of accommodating evangelical theology to evolutionary theory. "If it can be demonstrated to the satisfaction of all that evolution is contrary to Christian metaphysics then we must brand theistic evolution [and progressive creationism] as an impossible position. We shall be either Christians or evolutionists." Obviously, theistic evolutionists and progressive creationist believe that evolutionary theory is not contrary to Christian metaphysics. Historical contradictions are not important; metaphysical contradictions are.

Adventist theology also has a theological template. It implicitly rejects the metaphysical template on which Christian theology stands and replaces it with the Great Controversy metanarrative found in Scripture itself. Ellen White testified to the existence of an Adventist template when she explained that "the subject of the sanctuary . . . 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." There is one main difference between the classical metaphysical template and biblical metanarrative template: the former places God and His acts in a spiritual and timeless non-historical reality; the latter places God and His acts in the historical continuum of created reality. This help us to understand why Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians argue that since evolution fits the template of classical metaphysics, they can harmonize it to Christianity without changing its theological structure and inner logic.

Evolution does not fit the biblical template embodied in the Great Controversy metanarrative. Evolution is a metanarrative about the origins of human history that fits well in the timeless non-historical template into which Roman Catholic and Protestant theologies fit. By the same token, the evolutionary metanarrative collides with the Great Controversy metanarrative because both attempt to explain the same historical reality using different views of the causes involved in the process. Evolution and creationism are incompatible metanarratives.

The Role of Cosmology in Theological Interpretation
To understand the way in which deep-time evolutionary theory would affect Adventist theology and doctrines, we need to realize the over-arching role that cosmology — the study of the physical universe in time and space — plays in Christian theology. In theological thinking, cosmology is not a side issue but an issue that informs the understanding of all biblical teachings. Changes in these far-reaching ideas necessarily unleash changes in the entire theological system. To accommodate Genesis 1 to deep-time evolutionary theory, theologians implicitly modify the way they assume God acts in history. And this elicits massive reinterpretations of the entire system of biblical theology that articulates the history of God’s actions.
The Real Issue

From the theological perspective, the issue is not to decide between a literal versus a theological interpretation of Genesis 1 but between two different theological interpretations; a spiritual (philosophical), and a historical (biblical) understanding of divine activity in human history. Deep-time evolutionary theory and Genesis 1 are essential components of two incompatible metanarratives that attempt to explain the history of reality. Adventism cannot harmonize biblical creation with deep-time evolutionary theory without changing its essence and theological system. Harmonization with deep-time evolutionary theory affects the entire sweep of theological and scientific understandings.

Adventists who insist that our theology should reject Genesis 1 as theological history and accept deep-time evolutionary theory should explain to the rest of the worldwide body of believers the systematic consequences of such a paradigmatic change in theological detail. Such study would reveal the incompatibility of evolutionary theory and Adventist theology.

If Adventism were to adopt the deep-time evolutionary theological paradigm, the Great Controversy metanarrative on which the Adventist system of theology stands would be replaced. The pillars of the Adventist Church would be changed. The sola-tota-prima Scriptura principle would be replaced with the authority of science. In time, a reinterpretation would be required of the entire content of Adventist theology and fundamental beliefs. For instance, God’s act of redemption may become a continuation of His act of creation. In this context, Adventist doctrines such as the Sabbath, the law, the nature of sin, the sanctuary, redemption, and end times would no longer be speaking of historical realities but would become metaphors pointing to spiritual realities. Evil would be a part of God’s design and method of creation. The cross would no longer be the historical cause of eternal salvation but only a part in the process of historical evolution through which God is achieving the plan of creation. There would be no real historical heaven but a spiritual timeless contemplation of God.

Adventists need to reaffirm the fact that a theological understanding of Genesis 1 as describing the literal, historical, six-consecutive-24-hour-day period, through which God created our planet is essential to the theological thinking of Scripture, and therefore, to the harmonious system of truth that gave rise to Adventism and its mission.

REFERENCES

3 Ibid., p. 116 (emphasis in the original).
4 Ibid., p. 292.
5 Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy, p. 424
I once asked these exact same questions to any Christian who was foolish enough to acknowledge that they had faith in God. They called it “faith”; I called it “gullible.” I was contacted to write an article in this issue not because of any extraordinary scientific or theological expertise, but because of my past and what I went through in my life’s journey (so far). This article, therefore, might not appeal to some of you, especially if you’re just looking for a collection of scholarly jargon to throw back at an atheist at work that you yourself don’t fully understand. This article is a testimony of an atheist-turned-Adventist. If nothing else, I present to you my story to inspire you to not give up on the atheists in your life.

My story starts in Lansing, Michigan. I was born to two of the most loving and involved parents a boy could ever hope for. Since my parents weren’t Adventist (we didn’t even know any Adventists), all of my schooling until college was in public schools. I don’t regret my education for one minute, because it was a part of the foundation the Lord was laying for me. As far back as the first grade, I remember having teachers (along with my parents) who encouraged my love for mathematical and scientific activities. My third-grade teacher made science exciting, armed with fun experiments. I wanted to be a scientist, because my teachers made science fun.

It was about the time that I entered middle school that I encountered “the enemy of science”: religion. Up until my tenth birthday or so, my encounters with religion had been few and far between. I went to church for some Easters and Christmases, and I went to church the next day whenever I would spend Saturday night at my aunt’s house. I just understood “church” to be a place to go and talk (as dully as possible) about the fable of Jesus. Jesus was just a “holy” fairy tale that grown-ups invented to justify why they did or didn’t want to do something. It was about the time I entered middle school that I first heard the claims that God created the world—and Christians actually believed it to be fact! How absurd! That just seemed to be fundamentally against what I understood to be true, though my elementary teachers never directly addressed issues of origin.

In the ninth grade, I was given the intense joy (sarcasm) of studying biology. Of all of the science classes I have since taken, there was no subject I hated more. Whereas physics, chemistry, and earth sciences are all heavily math-based, biology is just a series of observations and guesses about the way the natural world operates. I’d ask how fast some process would take or how much an organism would grow, and the response would always be some vague answer. This never set well with me because I couldn’t understand how science could be so full of speculation yet so certain about the results. It sure beat the alternative view, however; who could realistically believe in an invisible and all-powerful Creator in a world with so little
Armed with the concept of “good God, bad world,” I started attacking the Christians at my high school. I would not attack them physically, of course; rather mentally and intellectually. The proper term for what I would do to them was “ridicule.” I remember one kid that I casually knew brought up his love for VeggieTales; I mocked and insulted him for this nearly every single day until graduation. How could somebody otherwise so normal believe in something as foolish as a Creator?

I was well on my way to a life of science by the time I graduated high school. I had taken college-level physics and chemistry in my last two years, and was awarded the science award at graduation. More significantly, I was the recipient of a "2+2+2 Engineering Scholarship." At the end of the program, I would have a bachelor's degree from Michigan State University in any engineering field I chose. I was also, unofficially, my school’s “Darwin Jr.”; an advocate of evolution and the big bang in the face of all who didn’t share my beliefs.

Darwin Jr. met his match about two weeks after high school graduation. I was invited to a birthday pool party in late June, but didn’t want anything to do with it. You see, the party was for my ex-girlfriend, and we weren’t exactly the best of friends. I was tempted to decline her invitation, but was ultimately convinced by a Muslim young lady that I needed to go. (Just a note: if God wants to accomplish something, He’ll make it happen, even if it means enlisting the services of a Muslim, or a Hindu, or a Buddhist, or even an atheist.) I went to the party, and it ended up every bit as uncomfortable as I expected it to be. I didn’t bond with any of the other people there, and ended up sitting by myself for most of the party.

Well, almost by myself. I noticed that the hostess also wanted nothing to do with the festivities, so she too was by herself. And she was cute. It didn’t take very much internal prodding to gather the courage to go over and talk to her. We quickly found several common bonds. We were both musicians; even though we went to rival high schools we both hated her high school; and neither of us drank, smoked, or had sex. Yes, this self-professed Darwin Jr. was outspoken against drinking, drugs, and premarital sex, and this was just another point that I held against the professed Christians who openly did those things even though their Lord asked them not to. If they didn’t take Him seriously, why should I?

It didn’t take very long before she asked the toughest question she could ask: “What church do you go to?” I laughed and said that I didn’t go to church, and that I was certain there wasn’t a God. She looked rejected, but I didn’t understand why. Certainly somebody as intelligent as her couldn’t fall for that Christian myth stuff? Indeed she had, and said that she was a Seventh-day Adventist. “Great,” I thought, “a Mormon.” Well, I’d seen the other "Christians" who claimed to believe but were easily corrupted.

She, however, was not easily corrupted. When I asked her to go out to see a movie with me on Friday night, she’d decline. She said, “Jesus asked me not to.” “For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day” (Ex. 20:11 NIV). Not only did she believe that Jesus was for real, but she linked Jesus’ teachings to “Creation.” In hindsight, I can’t believe I didn’t bail out almost immediately. I couldn’t get her to go out on Friday nights, I couldn’t get her to eat pepperoni pizza, I couldn’t get her to do ANYTHING!

It didn’t take long before the faith/unfaith issue really started to divide us. We dated for a few months, broke up, dated again, and broke up again. My mom says, to this day, that the saddest day in her life was the day that I told her (my mom) that we broke up because I was an atheist. She thought that getting me to pray before meals and taking me to church a few times a year was going to overcome a dozen years of science and naturalism in public schools.

Now, I know what you’re thinking at this point. Dated for a while, and broke up. Darwin Jr. hardly sounds defeated though, right? Little did I know that during our time apart, my ex was doing the single worst thing you could do for an atheist. No, not debating with me and actively trying to convert me. I loved to debate, remember? I used to find pleasure in making Christians cry. She hadn’t yet, nor did she, during this time, invite me to church or any church activity at all. The single worst thing you can do
for an atheist is pray for them. ("Worst," of course, from the atheist’s perspective.) It’s not fair! The deck is instantly stacked against them. Or, in this case, it was stacked against me. Just to clarify, her prayer was NOT that we’d get back together. She was finished with dating me. Her prayer was that I would be in the kingdom.

With her doing such an unfair thing behind my back as praying for me, it shouldn’t be any surprise that I suddenly couldn’t get her out of my head. Everywhere I turned, I was struck by reminders of this crazy Christian girl: the restaurants she introduced me to, the movies we watched together, etc. Something deep inside was telling me that life wasn’t so bad with her after all. So it happened; about a year after we met, and six months after we had last seen each other, I called her again. After just a few short days of reconnecting, we both realized that the spark was still there between us, and for the third time I was entering into a relationship with a person with a fundamentally different worldview than I.

As an interlude, let me address your question right now. I know what you’re thinking: “Doesn’t Paul, in 2 Corinthians 6:14, forbid her from having this relationship with you in the first place? How could she, a devout Seventh-day Adventist, willfully become unequally yoked to an atheist?” Her prayers and personal concern were always foremost for my salvation, not for our dating relationship. She wasn’t willing to compromise her faith just so we could be a couple. At the same time, she felt that God’s will was leading her to minister to me with such a close bond. As I described earlier, if I were asked to describe a Christian with one word, it wouldn’t be a positive word. Words like gullible, judgmental, and hypocritical all come to mind. Andrea was placed in my life to reveal God’s true character traits: love, holiness, compassion, grace, and mercy. Paul, with good reason, discourages us from casually connecting with a different outlook on the world; at the same time, when God calls you to share the love of God with an outsider (and you discuss it with a respected spiritual leader, such as a pastor or elder, to verify that it’s of God), who are you to object? Let’s return to the story.

As interested as we were in each other, our third attempt at a relationship started out flat. We were dating, happy to be together again, but it wasn’t any deeper than before. I was still struggling with the fact that I was dating a Christian, and she was still struggling because I was anti-Christian. One day, everything changed for us. After a lot of thinking, I decided that it was time to take our relationship more seriously. I loved her incredibly, and knew that she was the one for me. More importantly, I decided that some silly book wasn’t going to get in our way. If reading the Bible, just to get her off my back, was what it would take to show her that I was serious about her, I decided that I was going to “give it a shot.”

Little did I know, that same day Andrea also made a major decision. She was tired of our roller-coaster relationship, the ups and downs caused by differences in faith. She prayed to the Lord, “Lord, I’m done. I can’t deal with this anymore. Either something drastic happens soon or I’m leaving him for good and never turning back.” She prayed this prayer just two hours before I came over to announce that I wanted to read the Bible.

In my mind, my decision to read the Bible actually made a lot of sense from my atheistic standpoint. I had studied myths and fairy tales from a wide variety of cultures in history, and I expected to find several points where the Bible clearly identified itself as a work of fiction. There were a few stories that I had heard of in my younger years that especially screamed FAKE to me. For example: Jonah, the parting of the Red Sea, and especially, the story of Creation. If I could find absolute proof of something—anything—which could not possibly happen, I could dismiss the whole Bible as fiction.

I started reading “In the beginning.” While I was tempted to dispute the facts of Genesis 1, something struck me. My concept of a big bang was not incompatible with what I read about God’s act of creation. One moment there was nothing, and the next minute there was something. What (or who) caused the beginning of the universe? For the first time, I had to deal with “first cause.” If every action is a cause or an effect, what (or who) set the universe into motion in the first place? Furthermore, what purpose does the quality of beauty serve in this world? According to the naturalist perspective, everything that exists does so only because it serves a practical purpose. Hummingbirds, for example, have long beaks to eat nectar. Why then would the flowers and the fields be so beautiful on a summer day, or tropical fish have such amazing colors? The answers to these questions lead naturally
to the work of a delicate and caring Creator who crafted and placed the flowers in the fields and the fish in the seas, and then provided human beings (and humans alone) with the ability to recognize this quality.

Suddenly disturbed by these ideas, I jumped from Genesis 1 to Genesis 2. It is a well-taught fact that human beings are several hundred thousand years old, so I figured that such a fact would be perfect to throw out the biblical idea of human creation. When I read the story in Genesis 2, I was once again face-to-face with a question I wasn’t prepared for. Do you know how uncomfortable life can be when you have no purpose? Evolution taught me that my whole life served no purpose whatsoever in the grand scheme of the universe. I’m born, make the most of my situation, and then turn to worm food at some point. “What is the meaning of life?” I used to cry myself to sleep with that question, wondering why I bothered to get out of bed that morning. In Genesis 2, I found God giving man purpose. Adam woke up in the morning and went to work doing what God asked him to do by working in the garden. Gardening isn’t glamorous work, but Adam still found joy in doing it because it was God’s plan for his life. Adam woke up in the morning and kissed his wife. He didn’t just love Eve because she happened to be the only woman around, but because she was handmade by God just for Adam. If God gave purpose to Adam’s life, He might have a purpose for my life as well.

I flipped through the Bible, and was amazed at the stories it told. Genesis 3 introduces two more themes that I struggled with, evil in the world and the solution to evil. Why do bad things happen? How will it all end? None of the fables or fairy tales I had ever studied before addressed such issues, and even scholars today can do no better than simply guess. The Bible, on the other hand, did not shy away from answering these basic meta-narrative topics in a definitive way.

At the same time, I was amazed to learn more about God Himself. The gods of Roman or Greek myths were either totally disinterested in the actions of humans, or bumbling fools who were no wiser than goldfish. The God of the Bible cared deeply for humanity, even getting upset like a parent who sees their children turning their back and rebelling. God isn’t distant, nor is He foolish; the God of the Bible is a God who never gives up on humans no matter how often they give up on Him. I was astonished to see that Noah (even atheist Mike knew the story of Noah) developed a drinking problem, yet God still cared for him and tried to redeem his lost dignity. If God can be merciful to His children who make mistakes, can’t I do the same for the Christians I used to point at as hypocrites or frauds because they weren’t perfect? By the time I finished the story of King David, I was a certifiable believer in God.

Once I accepted God, things starting changing quickly in my life. The young lady that I talked about earlier invited me to church in 2003. I didn’t venture into the New Testament until early 2004, but once I did it didn’t take too long to see that Jesus was the main character of the whole Bible, the one the Old Testament referenced so many times. I was baptized in December 2004, and married Anndrea in July of 2005. Yes, the same Anndrea who stood as such a powerful Christian witness to me that she convinced me by her life that the Bible can be taken seriously. The same Anndrea who prayed not that we’d be together (because she was done with me) but that I’d be in the kingdom, ended up being the one that said “I do” to, standing by my side for better or for worse.

This story of my life is far from complete. I’ve been a baptized Seventh-day Adventist Christian for over five years now, and I have many other stories to tell about what God has done in and through me. Isn’t that what life is, after all? In the face of the theory of evolution, which says that life is a series of accidents and coincidences, the Bible shows us that God gave us our first breath, takes our last breath, and guides us gently every breath in between (Jeremiah 1:4).

I share this testimony with you, the reader, as yet another instance of God calling His lost children to Him. In hindsight (always 20/20, I know), I can now see how God was always there for me, preparing me for what He wanted me to do with my life. In your life, there are probably countless people who, like me, accepted the “truth” as taught to me by evolutionists, simply because they don’t trust the alternatives. Although most atheists won’t admit it, belief in the big bang requires just as much faith as believing that God created the world. Statistically speaking, it takes as much if not more faith to believe that we all evolved from pond scum as opposed to spontaneous creation by an all-loving God. Yet, I still preferred the scientific form of faith over religious faith primarily because I liked scientists more than I liked religious people.
Your life (yes, you the reader) could be the greatest evidence for or against God that your neighbor could ever see. By your example, outsiders can see a wide variety of attitudes towards faith: looking down on or making fun of non-believers or even each other, claiming to have the truth but ignoring its advice constantly, or having a generally closed-minded attitude towards new people or ideas can all lead outsiders to picture God in a similar way. Outsiders might decide that God too is mean or disrespectful, or perhaps His Word isn’t really all that important, based solely on your example. I ultimately decided to give the Creation story a shot not because of the story itself but because of the faithful, loving Christian who presented it to me. I could tell she genuinely cared about me, and that she also genuinely cared about God. What picture of religion are your neighbors, family members, or coworkers learning from you?