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Posted: 24 May 2011 09:00 PM PDT

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Further definition on tap for Adventist fundamental belief on creation

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May 25, 2011

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25 May 2011, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States...Elizabeth Lechleitner/ANN

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Last year, delegates of the 59th General Conference Session in Atlanta voted to reaffirm the church's belief in a "literal, recent, six-day creation." The vote formally endorsed a document drafted at the International Faith and Science Conference in 2004 and later that year affirmed by the church's Annual Council business meeting. The move addressed questions from some Adventists regarding interpretation of the denomination's Fundamental Belief Number 6.

The Reaffirmation of Creation statement specifies that the seven days in the Genesis creation account are "literal 24-hour days" and tags creation as "recent," while the existing fundamental belief reads, in part: "In six days the Lord made 'the heaven and the earth' ... and rested on the seventh day of that first week."

Because the Adventist Church cannot hold two official statements on the same belief, Session delegates also voted to grant top church administration what world church General Vice President Artur Stele called a "mandate" to merge the two statements' language and intent into one comprehensive fundamental belief.

The move is also expected to close what some Adventists claim is an interpretative loophole that hypothetically allows theistic evolution to explain the Genesis origins account, said Angel Rodriguez, director of the church's Biblical Research Institute (BRI) and Fundamental Beliefs Review Committee co-chair with Stele.

Theistic evolution posits that evolution is a natural process of creation, overseen by God, and seeks to make the biblical creation story compatible with natural evolution.

"We as the Adventist Church strongly believe that the Lord is our creator. If you take that away -- it's such a foundational belief -- or even compromise it, then there is an effect on other beliefs," Stele said.

Because theistic evolution stretches each creation day into epochs, many Adventists fear the theory threatens another of the church's core beliefs: observance of the seventh-day Sabbath as a celebration of the creation week.

While amending the church's fundamental beliefs might seem exceptional, it's neither unprecedented nor unsolicited. The preamble to the church's 28 Fundamental Beliefs invites revision as the church's understanding of truth expands.

"We state, 'This is how we understand Scripture,' but we also state that if we find a better expression or better wording -- or if our understanding is broadened -- then we will be open to change," Stele said. "We don't have to dim all the other denominations' concerns.