



Creation: the (Killer) Lesson Plan | BY CHARLES SCRIVEN

Some never answer the summons to humility of mind. They *know*. That's it. I suggest, though, that if you lead the following discussion (in Sabbath school or somewhere else), those in your circle will feel humbler afterwards. If our leaders participated in such a conversation, we might be spared the ordeal of changing Adventist Belief Number 6 (see below) into something polarizing and extra-biblical.

What follows is a discussion starter and could work as a handout. It will bring about wider understanding that we “see through a glass darkly” (1 Cor. 13) and ought to acknowledge *mystery*. That seems elementary enough, but for all too many, it's not.

Creation Controversies

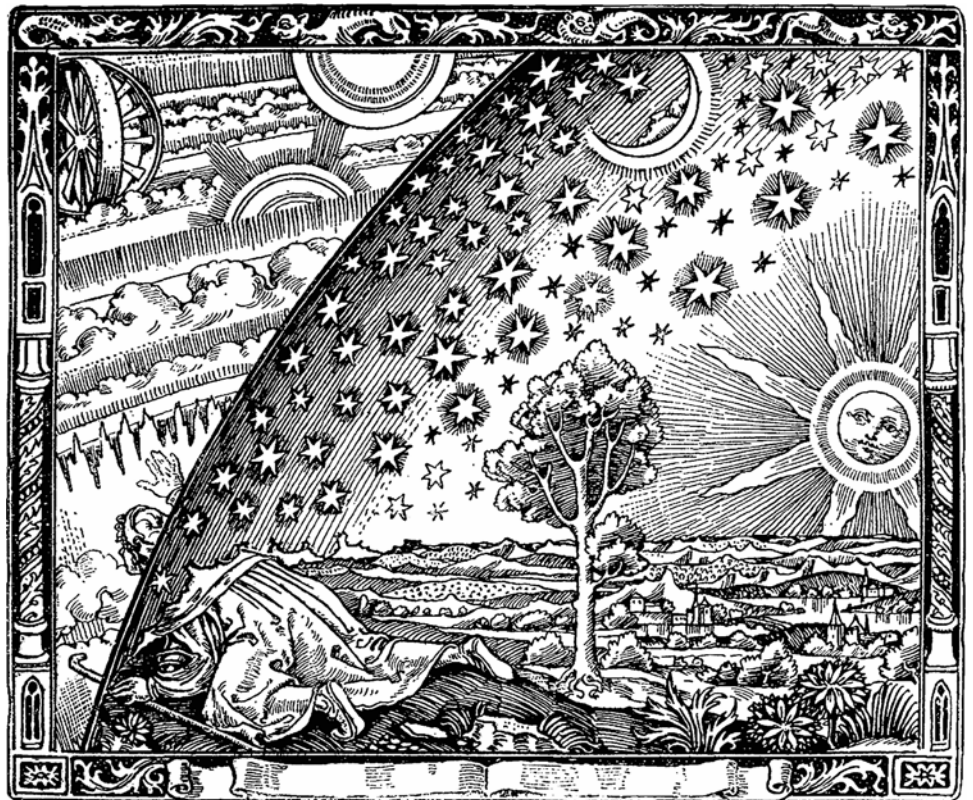
How might we deal, as brothers and sisters in Christ, with controversy concerning our understanding of creation? Consider the following Bible passages and the arresting bits of church experience that I describe, and consider the suggested questions. (I have noted, for each passage, the point that seems particularly pertinent for the topic.)

Scripture on scripture

2 Timothy 3:16, 17: Inspired writings serve a *practical* purpose; the point is equipping us—equipping church members—for “every good work.”

Scripture on creation

- Genesis 1:1–31: Creation is “good”; human beings appear *after* nearly everything else; they reflect God’s “image.”
- Genesis 2:4b–8, 15–25: Human beings appear *before* the garden is planted; God *forms* them from “dust,” and *breathes into* them the “breath of life.” They are meant to *share* life with others, to “till” and “keep” the garden, and to “name” the animals.
- Psalm 33:6–9: God creates by *speaking*; God also gathers the waters “in a bottle” and puts “the deeps in storehouses.”
- Isaiah 55:8–9 and Romans 11:33–36: God transcends—is “higher than”—we are; divine thoughts and



ways surpass human understanding. God is unsearchable, inscrutable—and we cannot (and should not) expect to answer all our questions.

- Mark 10:6–9: When Jesus alludes specifically to Genesis 1 and 2—the only time—his point, as in 2 Timothy 3, is *practical*, or *moral*; it concerns marriage.

Some questions about creation

- What *attitudes*—about the earth, about human potential and responsibility—does the Bible’s creation teaching encourage us to have?
- How can you tell when biblical words are meant “literally,” or when they are meant as “pictures” of something too deep for words? Or is there no *clear-cut* answer, and must we learn to live with ambiguity?
- In Jesus’ view, the creation story serves as a premise for *how to live*. In what way might Jesus’ example affect the way you interpret Genesis?

The Adventist creation controversies

- At present, top Adventist officials want the next session of the church’s General Conference to adopt a re-written Belief Number 6 (on creation).
- The current statement says that Scripture gives the “authentic account” of God’s “creative activity,” and alludes, with quoted phrases, to Genesis 1; it encourages a straightforward reading of the passage but does not spell out more detail than the Bible itself gives.
- Officials want the statement to *say more*; they want official Adventist belief to assert that creation occurred—literally—some 6,000 or so years ago, over seven contiguous, 24-hour days.
- A few—often, the well-educated—worry that such a statement will marginalize, or even exclude, scientists (and others) who may think this degree of literality incompatible with the empirical evidence concerning earth’s history.



The Galileo episode

In the early fifteenth century, the great scientist Galileo (*pictured, left*) got into trouble for doubting the Catholic Church’s teaching that the sun revolves around the (motionless) earth. For these doubts the papacy eventually sentenced him to house arrest. Consider these Bible

passages the papacy used against Galileo:

- Joshua 10:12–14: The sun *stopped*, and “did not hurry to set”; the premise is a *geocentric* universe.
- 1 Chronicles 16:30: The “world is firmly established...shall never be moved.”
- Psalm 93:1: Again, the world “shall never be moved.”
- Ecclesiastes 1:5: The “sun rises...goes down...hurries to the place where it rises.”

More questions

- Even very traditional Adventists would agree that Galileo was right and the papacy wrong. Do Adventist leaders today run the risk of repeating the papacy’s mistake? Why, or why not?
- How does your theory of Scriptural inspiration help you deal with the passages that assume the sun revolves around the earth?
- How might we affirm God’s creative activity without provoking division or seeming silly? Or without claiming (as the papacy once did) to know more of the divine *mystery* than mere creatures can ever know?
- How might we read the Genesis stories straightforwardly without insisting that every one of us must interpret the details exactly alike?
- Again, what does the Bible’s creation teaching tell us about our hopes and responsibilities as children of God on earth?



Pope Paul V
by Caravaggio, c. 1605

There ends the lesson plan. Why say it’s a “killer” plan? Because the time your group spends with these passages, stories and questions will slay the dragon of intellectual pride. You may continue to read Genesis the way would-be revisers of Belief Number 6 want you to read it. But now you will not be cocky. You will allow your brothers and sisters to acknowledge the struggles they have and to explore solutions that might not be identical with your own.

Anything less and you would be like the Pope who came down on Galileo. ■

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