



Adventism and Creation - Crossing the Rubicon

Victor Christensen

The biblical creation doctrine provides both the basis for worship and the means of identifying who we worship. All worship requires, at least cognitively, a focus on something outside and greater than ourselves. And the purer this objectivity in worship the purer will be our connection to the Absolute.

The oxygen that gave life to Old Testament worship is described as yir'at 'elohim, an emotional mix of apprehension and attraction, which registers in the conscience of the believer as yere' 'elohim or God-fearing. As a moral force yir'at 'elohim provides spontaneity to an obedience free of all calculations concerning reward and punishment because its own vehicle is an inner knowing of a protective presence. Beside this empirical knowledge of God there existed a written torah that offered promises of divine protection and expressions of affection unaffected by individual success or failure. If there was punishment for sin it was mostly intended as a pathway to restored fellowship with God.

At its centre the Old Testament has no doctrine, from beginning to end it is essentially inspired history. And since we are discussing creation we need to understand that there is no "doctrine" of creation, there is only an inspired testimony describing an as-it-happened history of creation, either by God directly, or through Moses, who visually witnessed a prophetic replay of primordial events.

Whether it is God speaking directly, or Moses writing what God revealed to him, the authority of the entire biblical testimony has the force of God speaking. And the minutest tampering with holy words intended to be accepted unconditionally as "God speaking" is a certain and fast track to perdition.

Our acceptance of the creation story, *unedited as God Himself explains it*, determines our relationship with Him. If we reject "God speaking" we have rejected God, and for that He will reject us. "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite, and trembles at My word." (Isa.66:2)

Crossing the Rubicon

The concept of a two-stage creation of the earth covering "millions and billions" of years has a long history within the Adventist Church. Uriah Smith endorsed the idea in a Review article in 1860 and George McCready Price (Outlines of Modern Science and Modern Christianity) promoted it in 1902.

By 1937 the old earth theory had established an assertive presence in Adventists institutions.

"In 1937 a number of Adventist science teachers had had a meeting at which *they decided they would have to accept the 'old earth' view of the evolutionists.*" (History Of Modern Creationism, Henry M. Morris, Chapter IV)

In 1991 a conference was organized to discuss long standing tensions in the Adventist Church over creation. The President of the General Conference Robert Folkenberg attended the meeting. In his Spectrum article James Haywood says that Ariel Roth explained to Folkenberg that the concept of theistic evolution was being taught in a significant number of Adventist institutions. Haywood wrote,

“Roth took the occasion to inform the new President and other participants *that large numbers of Adventist scientists had become evolutionists.*” (James Hayward, The Many Faces of Adventist Creationism: ’80-’95, Spectrum, Volume 25, Number 3, p.25)

In around 2001 the Seventh-day Adventist Theology Handbook came out supporting the old-earth theory. “The text (Genesis 1:2) acknowledges the fact that the inert earth was in a watery state *before the events of the creation week*, but is not especially concerned with identifying how long it may have been in that state.” (Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, Vol.12 p.419)

In his 2002 “The Biblical Account of Origins” Richard Davidson made an attempted to support the two-stage creation thesis with suspect biblical evidence syncretized with erroneous radiometric dating. His writings demonstrate a complete failure to take into account the narrow limits of ancient Hebrew conceptual parameters and at every point they totally contradict 2000 years of rabbinic interpretation.

“Gen. 2 seems to point toward a *two-stage creation for this earth.* ... [T]he text of Gen 1:1 does not indicate how long before creation week the universe (‘heavens and earth’) was created. *It could have been millions or billions of years.*” (Richard Davidson, The Biblical Account of Origins pp. 23, 21)

In January 2013 a new epoch was reached in the creation debate. For the first time the old earth thesis was made public and presented to the corporate body as an “approved” teaching of the church.

“The Bible starts with the story of Creation, and the Creation story starts with a statement that God is Creator. ... When the story begins, *the planet is already here* but unformed, unfilled, dark, and wet. ... *The text does not tell us exactly when the rocks and water of the earth came into existence, only that the world had not always been suitable for life.*”

“When the earth was first brought into existence, it was unsuitable for life. ... *The Bible says nothing about the time period between the original creation of the rocks and water and the creation of the environment and the creatures.*”

“The simple fact is, *we don’t know, nor does it really matter.* ... The crucial point is that the Lord, *who was not dependent upon pre-existing matter, used matter that He had at some point already created ...*” (L. James Gibson, Sabbath School Quarterly Q1 Origins, (January 5–11) p.2.5)

To say God was “not dependent upon *pre-existing matter*, [but] used matter that He had *at some point already created*” is tortuous nonsense. Nobody claims God was “dependent” on pre-existing matter *He did not create. The issue is, did He make use of ‘pre-existing matter’ created previously.*

In a recent ‘Adventist Report’ Gibson wrote; “We can see here that mixing biblical truths with non-biblical views generates logical absurdities that should be of concern to the honest seeker of truth.” Surely the attempt to syncretize a timeframe of “million and billions” of years *based on radiometric dating* and a literal “six-day” timeframe *based on Scripture* is the mother of “logical absurdities.”

Creatio Ex Nihilo and Adventist Duplicity

In a number of Adventist institutions in different countries, *and with the knowledge of the General Conference*, the six-day creation based on creatio ex nihilo has been subjected to radical revision, *even when assurance was given insisting that the church had not changed its historic teachings.*

In order to accommodate conflicting interpretations of creation (theistic evolution, the two-stage hypothesis and creation ex nihilo) church officials have resorted to making generalizations in which official statement on accepted church teachings have become compatible with any and every opinion.

“Historically, the Adventist church has officially advocated the Genesis creation narrative; however, there is a wide variety of viewpoints within the church, including those that believe in evolution and theistic evolution. ***The official statement of belief regarding the subject is specifically worded to allow a variety of viewpoints.***” (Loma Linda University Church of Seventh-day Adventists, Wikipedia)

The practice of investing established terminology with plastic properties has become the norm in the creation debate. Those who support the “million and billions” of years old timeframe continue to speak of “creatio ex nihilo” and a “six-day creation” but give these terms new undisclosed meanings.

James Gibson writes, “God created ***the entire universe*** [creatio] ex nihilo.”¹ It turns out, however, what Gibson means by “the entire universe” is somewhat different to its accepted meaning. According to Robert Brown the “entire universe” ***does not include the “earth”*** which, he says, was created differently. According to him; “***there is no direct mention of its [earth’s] creation ex nihilo throughout the Bible.***”² (¹Issues in Intermediate Models of Origins.p.4, ²Too Much Creation?)

According to Richard Davidson; “The account of creation ***throughout Gen 1*** emphasizes the absolute transcendence of God over matter. ... ***implying creatio ex nihilo*** ...”¹ Yet on p.24 of the same article Davidson tells us, “Gen 1:1-2 is ***structurally outside*** of the parameters of the six days.”(¹Origins p.7)

First we are told “creatio ex nihilo” applies “***throughout Gen 1***” and then we are told that ***it does not apply to “Gen 1:1-2.”*** because Gen 1:1-2 is “structurally outside of the parameters of the six days.”

The natural interpretation of “throughout Gen 1” means the ***entire chapter*** of Genesis 1:1 is based on “creatio ex nihilo” (from nothing.) If Davidson knew what he was doing the evidence suggest he was engaged in an attempt get those who believe in creatio ex nihilo to think that he believes what they believe. The fact is, Davidson does not believe creatio ex nihilo applies “throughout Gen 1” ***in the accepted meaning of the idea.*** Likewise when James Gibson says, “God created the ***entire universe*** [creatio] ex nihilo” ***he excludes the earth from that description*** but somehow fails to tell anybody.

Although Davidson can say in one place; “The account of creation ***throughout Gen 1*** emphasizes ... ***creatio ex nihilo***” he can write on the ***same topic*** in other places ***and teach the exact opposite.***

“In the creation account of Gen 1:3ff. there is an emphasis [on] ... ***previously-created materials.*** ... On the third day ... the ***previously-existing earth*** brought forth vegetation (Gen 1:9-12) ... God began with the ***previously created*** ground or clay.” God “starts with the raw materials that are ***already created.***” “On the fifth day ... God’s use of ***pre-existing elements.***” (Origins, pp.22-23)

As Davidson explains it the two-stage creation thesis has “creatio ex nihilo” for everything in the universe ***except the six-day creation outlined from Genesis 1:3-27.*** What this tells us is that Adventist theologians and scientists reject the plain reading of Exodus 20:11 which teaches ***a six-day creation for the entire earth,*** both for the shamayim and the 'erets “***and everything that is in them.***”

Hebrew Meanings in Genesis 1:1-2

Creation ex nihilo is the fundamental expression of who God is. It is more than an assertion that He made everything from nothing. *Creatio ex nihilo (yesh me'ayin) is not a statement about what God does; it is a statement about who He is.* Paul writes, “God ... calls into existence the things that do not exist.” Take that away and something essential to God being God is missing. (Romans 4:17)

The problem for theologians at Andrews and scientists at Loma Linda can be explained simply, none of them understand Hebrew. As has been demonstrated previously, *re'shiyth refers to sequence or numerical location within the historical order not chronological time.* J. Etheridge translation of the Aramaic Targum of Onkelos reads; “In the *first times* the Lord created heaven and earth.”¹ In Genesis 1:1 re'shiyth identifies *the first “epoch”* which precedes all other “epoch” in the understanding *an “epoch” is a segment of history made up of connected events and not a specific pinpoint of time.*

According to Philo re'shiyth represents *numerical order*, not chronological time; ““In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth:’ *taking the beginning to be not as some men think, that which is according to time ... it is the beginning according to number ...* so that, ‘In the beginning he created,’ is equivalent to ‘*first of all* he created the heaven.’” (On the Creation bk. I: 7)

The flaw in the two-stage creation thesis is a false reading of the Hebrew method of calculating time. In Hebrew thinking there is no linear sequence labelled past, present and future or vast empty gaps between events. *For the Hebrew there is no “time” only “times” which interconnect and merge into each other.* “The distinguishing feature of Hebrew verb forms is the expression of *continuity of an action rather than distinguishing between past, present, or future.*”¹(¹Ole J. Thienhaus, Jewish Time)

In the modern concept time is interpreted as a “space dimension” in which “time” *as a self-existing entity can exist independent of its content.* This is a spatial concept of time. The Hebrew concept of time is “dynamic” or existential. Events do not occur “in” time, rather events are the essence of time.

In Hebrew reckoning history is made up of a succession of time blocks called an “aiōn” and each aiōn is connected at both ends (without gaps) to the “aiōn” preceding it and the “aiōn” that comes after it like links in a chain. Genesis 1:1 to Genesis 3:24 represents the re'shiyth or “first” aiōn in world history. In Hebrew thought everything prior to re'shiyth is classified as `olam, meaning “out of sight.”

What this means is the concept of a “millions and billions of years” time gap between Genesis 1:1-2 and Genesis 1:3-27 is an invention of misdirected cloistered academics that neither the Hebrew language nor the conceptual parameters of the times possessed the didactic mechanism to formulate.

Those who teach the two stage creation say they believe “God created the *entire universe* ex nihilo.” *Yet they believe God took “millions and billions” of years to create one small and obscure planet.*

Philo, who at one time believed in creatio ex materia also, at another time, believed in creatio ex nihilo. Which goes to show that creatio ex nihilo was a live idea within Judaism in the times of Jesus.

“God, the begetter of all things not only brought them into sight, *but even made things which previously had no existence*, being not merely an artificer but the Creator Himself.” (Philo, On Dreams 1.76)

According to Maren Niehoff rabbinic sources indicate that Gamaliel, “a doctor of the law” in the days of Jesus (Acts 5:35) and Paul’s religious instructor, (Acts 22:3) “defends a creatio ex nihilo theology as if this doctrine were self-evident.” (Maren Niehoff, *Creatio ex Nihilo Theology in Genesis in the Light of Christian Exegesis*. p.47)

The document “Shepherd of Hermas” shows creatio ex nihilo was also taught by the early Christians.

“First of all, believe that God is one, who created all things and set them in order, **and brought all things into existence out of what did not exist [ek tou me ontos.]**” (Shepherd of Hermas 26.1)

R. Saadia Gaon, head of the Sura Academy in Babylon and “Jewish exegete, philosopher, and polemicist **whose influence on Jewish literary and communal activities made him one of the most important Jewish scholars of his time. ... [taught] creatio ex nihilo (creation out of nothing)** in order to ascertain the existence of a Creator-God.” (Saadia Gaon, *Emunot ve-Deot*, pt. 1 Ch. 2)

The Hebrew text in Genesis 1:1 **makes no reference to “the heaven and the earth.”** Which is not surprising because the Hebrews had no understanding of “heaven and earth” as a 20th century concept.

Genesis 1:1 teaches when the first (re’shiyth) aiōn of world history began (see John 9:32) God created “the sky (shamayim) and the (’erets) land.” Verse 2 tells us at that point the ’erets, or land, was *tohu bohu*. **And we are told what tohu bohu means, its means the ’erets, or land was covered by the “deep - waters.”** Next we are told the ’erets remained in the state of tohu bohu until day three when “God said, ‘Let the water under the sky (shamayim) be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.’ ... God called the dry ground land (’erets).” In the Hebrew text the ’erets was not created until day three.

Genesis 1:1 is an introduction to **what follows** and not a reference to a past event “millions and billions” of years before the six days of creation began. In the Hebrew text as clearly explained in Exodus 20:11, God create the entire planet and “everything” connected to it in six literal 24 hour days.

“For in six days the Lord made the shamayim and the ’erets, the sea, and **everything** that is in them.”

“Thus says the Lord, who created the heavens He is God who formed the earth and made it, He established it **and did not create it a waste place**, (tohu) but formed it to be inhabited.” (Isa 45:18 NASB)

“[T]he word Éeres (earth) refers primarily to the dry surface of our planet and to its life does not allow us to conclude that Genesis 1 portrays a second stage of a two-stage creation, first the matter of the planet, then the earth, with a temporal interval in between. It does allow a distinction of perspective between our world system, heaven and earth, and the earth as dry land with its life and territories, **but any temporal distinction between them we will have to introduce on our own initiative, without the help of the Bible.**” (Niels-Erik Andreasen, *The Word Earth in Genesis 1:1*)

“The action involved with the word (bara) is the first activity of biblical history. **It is used exclusively to refer to God’s creative work; it refers to creating things ex nihilo, or out of nothing.**” (The Complete Biblical Library, *The Old Testament, Hebrew-English Dictionary*, World Library Press (Springfield, Mo., U.S.A) p.578)

Appendix

“I am charged to tell our people that some do not realize that the devil has device after device and he carries these out in ways that they do not expect. ... *I tell you now, that when I am laid to rest, great changes will take place.* ... I want the people to know that I warned them fully before my death.”

(Manuscript 1, Feb. 24, 1915)

“Here we see that the church the Lord's sanctuary was the first to feel the stroke of the wrath of God. *The ancient men, those to whom God had given great light and who had stood as guardians of the spiritual interests of the people, had betrayed their trust.*” (5T.211)

“It is with reluctance that the Lord withdraws His presence from those who have been blessed with great light and who have felt the power of the word in ministering to others. *They were once His faithful servants, favored with His presence and guidance; but they departed from Him and led others into error, and therefore are brought under the divine displeasure.*” (5T.212)

“Let the son of deceit and false witness be entertained by a church that has had great light, great evidence, *and that church will discard the message the Lord has sent, and receive the most unreasonable assertions and false suppositions and false theories.* ... *Many will stand in our pulpits with the torch of false prophecy in their hands, kindled from the hellish torch of Satan.*” (TM 409)

“The people have lost confidence in those who have the management of the work. Yet we hear that the voice of the Conference is the Voice of God. Every time I have heard this, *I have thought that it was almost blasphemy.*” (Ms. 37, 1901)

“I have but very little confidence that the Lord is giving these men in positions of responsibility spiritual eyesight and heavenly discernment. I am thrown into perplexity over their course; and I desire now to attend to my special work, *to have no part in any of their councils, and to attend no camp-meetings, nigh nor afar off.* My mind shall not be dragged into confusion by the tendency they manifest to work directly contrary to the light that God has given me.” (17MR 64)

“No superiority of rank, dignity, or worldly wisdom, no position in sacred office, will preserve men from sacrificing principle when left to their own deceitful hearts. *Those who have been regarded as worthy and righteous prove to be ring leaders in apostasy and examples in indifference and in the abuse of God's mercies.* Their wicked course He will tolerate no longer, and in His wrath He deals with them without mercy.” (5T.212.001)

“If the church of God becomes lukewarm, *it does not stand in favor with God any more than do the churches that are represented as having fallen and become the habitation of devils,* and the hold of every foul spirit, and the cage of every unclean and hateful bird. Those who have had opportunities to hear and receive the truth and who have united with the Seventh-day Adventist church ... and yet possess no more vitality and consecration to God than do the nominal churches, will receive of the plagues of God just as verily as the churches who oppose the law of God.” (19MR 176)

“If God abhors one sin above another, of which His people are guilty, it is of doing nothing in a case of emergency. *Indifference or neutrality in a religious crisis is regarded of God as a grievous crime; and equal to the very worst type of hostility against God.*” (RH, Sept 30, 1873)