

Péter HOLLÓ¹:

Creation or Evolution? – Seventh-day Adventists and Natural Science in Hungary

Abstract.

In my study, I examine the Seventh-day Adventist theological thought from the point of view of its response to the challenges of Darwinism and how this topic is reflected in Hungary. The subject is also interesting because the founding of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (1863) and the publication of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859) coincide, so the church had to deal with a topic that was – and still is – a major challenge for Christianity as a whole. As we shall see from the study, unlike many Christian denominations, the Church's position has remained consistent throughout in rejecting Darwin's theory from the outset and in trying to point out its potential pitfalls on an ideological basis. Hungarian Adventist theologians have also addressed this issue in a number of works. In the first part of my study, I will describe the ideological basis for the adherence to creationism in Seventh-day Adventist theological thought. I will then explore the ways in which this conviction was expressed in the writings of Hungarian Adventist theological thinkers in the 20th and 21st centuries (e.g. Jenő

¹ Associate Professor, Rector, Sola Scriptura Theological College, Department of Church History, Biatorbágy; e-mail: hollo.peter@sola.hu.



Szigeti, Attila Szabó). I will discuss the particular supra-denominational organization that brought together in Hungary all those researchers and scholars who argued against the theory of evolution. Finally, I will present the work of Zsuzsa Vankó, the most prominent Hungarian Seventh-day Adventist theologian on the subject.

Keywords: Adventist, Darwinism, Creationism, Hungarian, theory

The Seventh-day Adventist Church and Creationism

The Seventh-day Adventist Church was founded in the United States in 1863, following the Advent movement in Europe and North America in the first half of the 19th century. The denomination, which professes the ideological heritage of the Reformation, was established in Hungary in 1898. In 1975 and in the following years, the Hungarian Adventist community experienced a secession as a result of a faith protest movement, which led to the formation of the Christian Advent Community in 1990.

Since both denominations in Hungary define themselves as Seventh-day Adventist, for the sake of simplicity I will refer to all those mentioned in the two denominations as Adventist theologians in my study. The name of the denomination carries a dual message: the adjective 'seventh-day' refers to the fact that church members do not observe Sunday as the weekly day of rest but as the seventh day of the biblical order, the Sabbath. The term Adventist refers to the imminent return of Jesus Christ, the Second Advent.

The creation narrative of the Bible (Genesis 1–2) is emphasized in the Adventist theology. As the credo of the denomination reads, "To emphasize its importance, the Creator placed the injunction to remember this sacred memorial of His creative power in the center of the moral law as an everlasting sign and symbol of Creation."² The Sabbath as a weekly day of rest is emphasized in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:8–11 – the longest of all the commandments). However, the New Testament did not abolish it either, since Jesus spoke of it several times (Matt 24:20, Mark 2:27), and He and the early Christians celebrated the Sabbath.

² *Seventh-day Adventists Believe... A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (1988) 74. Hagerstown, Review and Herald.

Adventist theology, professing the exegetical principle of sola Scriptura (the Scripture alone), argues from the text of the Bible that the text itself allows only one interpretation. The Hebrew term *yom*, which the English text translates as ‘day’ when accompanied by a definite number, always means a real 24-hour day (see e.g. Gen 7:11, Exod 16:1). According to a statement in the creeds of the Church “each day (*yom*) was filled with creative activity, and then the Sabbath climaxed the Creation week. The 24-hour Sabbath day, therefore, commemorates a literal week of Creation. The fourth commandment would be meaningless were each day stretched into aeons.”³

The Challenge of Evolutionary Theory – The Arguments of Hungarian Adventist Theologians

The Seventh-day Adventist Church first set out its own beliefs in 1931, which included an adherence to creation theory (however, Adventist exegetes had already declared their commitment to creationism before this), and this has not changed since.⁴ Interestingly, Adventist theological thinking on evolutionism has also influenced American evangelicals. For a few decades, evangelicals saw the two ideas as compatible, but in the 1920s and 1930s they gradually turned away from this idea. George McCready Price, a researcher with Adventist ancestry, published an article in *Princeton Theological Review* in 1926, which led to a marked change in the theological outlook of evangelicals (in which Price argued for the rejection of evolutionism).⁵

Turning to the Hungarian aspects of the topic: the Hungarian denomination has evidently identified with this idea from the very beginning and shares the same belief in the biblical account of the creation of the Earth and the world. For example, one of the first Adventist theological works to be published in Hungarian argues in this way, citing

³ Op. cit. 71.

⁴ SZILVÁSI, József (ed.) (1997): *A hetedik napot ünneplő adventisták hitelvei. A 27 alapvető hitelv bibliai magyarázata* (Original title: *Seventh-day Adventists Believe... A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines*). Transl. by Magda Bánfiné Roóz – Krisztina Zarkáné Teremy. Budapest, Advent Kiadó. 3. József Szilvási points out here that the need to record the doctrines of faith was expressed in the church as early as 1872, and a short summary of them was prepared at the time, but no vote was taken at the level of the board.

⁵ LIVINGSTONE 1997, 158–167.

several biblical verses: “The loving nature of the divine will is perfectly expressed in the fact that man is created by Christ (...) The image of God is reflected in man, because he created man in his own image.”⁶

However, the theory of evolution, which appeared in the 19th century, was a significant challenge for Adventist theology, and within a short period of time it conquered the scientific world and was adopted by the vast majority of Christian denominations. Béla Gyarmati, the leading Hungarian Adventist theologian and publisher of the first half of the 20th century, refers to this theory in his work published in the 1940s: “The cherished child of unbelief: the theory of evolution, the doctrine that everything came into being by itself, through millions of years of evolution. This fallacy is widely believed. It has become the pioneer of materialism, which has a very harmful influence on the general moral level.”⁷ The author thus severely criticized this view, which very quickly became widely known and popular.

Adventist theologians have always tried to point out the questionable or weak points of the theory of evolution, so there are also several publications in Hungary that collect arguments and thoughts on this issue. Their basic concept is that the origin of the world cannot be investigated by scientific means because we cannot repeat the processes that took place at that time. In both cases, the theory of evolution and the theory of creation are – by definition – theories. This is the reason they essentially do not examine the questions of the origin of the world on a scientific basis but on an ideological one. In my study, I would like to present these publications.

First among the publications dealing with the question of creation or evolution should be mentioned a volume by Pastor Márta Árvai,⁸ which collects the ideas of 20th-century natural scientists, including Nobel Prize-winning physicist Alfred Kastler, Nobel

⁶ CONRADI, Ludwig Richard (1914): *A titok felfedezve vagy a hét pecsét feltörve* (Original title: *Das Geheimnis enthüllt oder die sieben Siegel gebrochen*. 1911). Translator unknown. Budapest, Vallásos Iratok Nemzetközi Kiadóhivatala. 15–16.

⁷ GYARMATI, Béla (n. d.): *A világdráma utolsó felvonása. Az apokalipszis megrázó jelenetei* [The Final Act of the Global Drama. Shocking Scenes of the Apocalypse]. Budapest, Élet és Egészség. 177–178.

⁸ ÁRVAI, Márta (2001): *Kezdetben... Új kérdésfelvetések és régi válaszok világunk eredetéről* [In the Beginning... New Questions and Old Answers about the Origins of Our World]. Budapest, BIK Könyvkiadó.

Prize-winning biochemist Albert Szent-Györgyi, biologist Jacob Segal, mathematician Hans Rohrbach, etc., and uses them to explore the idea that our current knowledge is not sufficient to answer the ultimate questions with certainty. Even the greatest representatives of natural science express their uncertainty about the origin of life, and it is therefore necessary to approach these questions with a certain caution.

Dr Imre Tokics, theologian, university professor, and lecturer at the Adventist Theological College, presents the differences between the two ideas in his book *Creation or Darwin?* in a dialogue. The dialogue between a Protestant pastor and a young university student raises questions that make the student think about the subject. One of the key ideas in the book is that in natural science “there is no single explanation that can explain how the living came from the inanimate”.⁹ The book also argues that to believe that life spontaneously arose on Earth on its own “requires even more than belief in a miracle”.¹⁰

In his short paper entitled *Problems around Evolution*, the theologian and church historian Jenő Szigeti makes a similar argument. He explains that even scientists who accept the theory of evolution express the view that their opinions are “based on some kind of ‘faith’”, and he also points out that scientists who accept the theory of evolution are not unanimous on a number of issues.¹¹ Both Adventist scholars therefore try to look at this debate from a broader perspective, pointing out that it is rather difficult to take a “scientific” position on this issue, since it is not possible to repeat either the process of creation or that of the evolution.

Jenő Szigeti also argues in his work written in 2015 (*Why Saturday?*) that Sabbath is a celebration and birthday of creation. He refers to Jürgen Moltmann, who wrote about the Sabbath: “It is remarkable that in the Christian tradition, especially in the Western churches, creation is mostly presented as the work of the six days. Creation, completed on the seventh day, is heavily overshadowed or overlooked. (...) The God who

⁹ TOKICS, Imre (2006): *Teremtés vagy Darwin?* [Creation or Darwin?]. Budapest, Élet és Egészség. 51–52.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ SZIGETI, Jenő (1987): Problémák az evolúció körül [Problems around Evolution]. In: *Lelkész-tájékoztató*. 1987/1. 29.

rests on the Sabbath, the God who blesses and celebrates, who rejoices in his own creation, and who is by that very fact the sanctifying God, is completely overshadowed.”¹² This quote underlines that the question of the day of rest cannot be separated from the question of creation since the two are closely related. In his book *Creator God or Big Bang?* (2012), Peter Zarka compares the question of creation or evolution on an ideological basis and shows in detail that on this basis the two ideas cannot be brought together.

Although Adventist theological thought is not creationist in its foundations, it is worth mentioning that because of their ideological connections, Adventist book distribution also includes publications related to creationism that have been published in translation – for example, Walt Brown’s *In the Beginning – The Convincing Evidence of Creation and the Flood*, a lengthy work arguing for creationism on scientific grounds. (It is available in Hungarian from 2010.)¹³

In addition, works by other foreign authors are usually also available in translation, for example works of Werner Gitt (1937–), an engineer by profession, but whose work is very important within the creationist movement. Also worth mentioning Willem J. Ouweeneel (1944–) and Reinhard Junker (1956–) (both biologists and theologians), who have several works on this topic available in Hungarian. Although there are no written works related to his activities, it should be noted that the Adventist preacher József Végh has several videos available on the Internet on the subject. He has also appeared on PAX television many times.

One of the universities of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Loma Linda University in California, has a separate institute called the Geoscience Institute, which publishes regularly (Ariel Roth, former director of the Institute, has a book entitled *Origins, Linking Science and Scripture*, available in Hungarian).¹⁴

¹² MOLTSMANN, Jürgen (1989): *A reménység fényei*. (Original title: *Theologie der Hoffnung*. 1964). Transl. by Sándor Szathmáry. Budapest, Református Zsinati Iroda. 321. Cited in: SZIGETI, JENŐ (2015): *Miért éppen a szombat?* [Why Saturday?]. Budapest, „Boldog Élet” Alapítvány. 6.

¹³ BROWN, Walt (⁸2010): *Kezdetben – A teremtés és az özönvíz meggyőző bizonyítékai* (Original title: *In the Beginning – The Convincing Evidence of Creation and the Flood*. 2008). Transl. by Károly Sonnleitner. Budapest, BIK Könyvkiadó.

¹⁴ NUMBERS 1993, 283.

It can be said, therefore, that Adventist book distribution is constantly striving to present literature by non-Adventist authors that may be of scientific interest to those interested in the subject of creation or evolution.

A Supra-denominational Organization: The Role of the Intelligent Design Movement

A breakthrough for Seventh-day Adventist theologians in Hungary was the formation of a national organization at the beginning of the third millennium whose members rejected the theory of evolution. This brought them together with researchers and scientists who thought along similar lines.

In 2001, a working group called the Intelligent Design Working Group (ÉRTEM) – later called the Intelligent Design Movement Association – was founded in Hungary, which is open to all scientists and theologians, regardless of denomination, who believe in creationism. According to the description on the association's website:

Intelligent design is a scientific approach according to which the physical and biological systems observed in the universe have come into being by intelligent, purposeful design, rather than by chance, through uncontrolled natural processes. The Intelligent Design Movement (ÉRTEM) Association, which has been active since 2001, aims to bring the argument of intelligent design and the shortcomings of theory of evolution to the attention of the general public and the scientific world. To this end, the Association publishes books and films, and its members organize conferences, scientific debates, and lectures.¹⁵

¹⁵ <https://ertem.hu/az-ertelmes-tervezettseg-mozgalomrol/> (last accessed: 27 May 2024). „Az intelligens tervezettség az a tudományos megközelítés, amely szerint az univerzumban megfigyelhető fizikai és biológiai rendszerek intelligens, céltudatos tervezés nyomán jöttek létre, nem pedig véletlenül, irányítatlan természeti folyamatok révén. A 2001 óta működő Értelmes Tervezettség Mozgalom (Értem) Egyesület arra törekszik, hogy az intelligens tervezettség érvrendszerét, valamint az evolúcióelmélet hiányosságait megismertesse a nagyközönséggel és a tudományos világgal. Ennek érdekében az Egyesület könyveket és filmeket jelentet meg, tagjai konferenciákat és tudományos vitákat szerveznek, valamint előadásokat tartanak.”

The association therefore aims to bring together all those scientists and theologians who can identify with the ideals of purposeful design and are prepared to point out the shortcomings and questionable points of evolutionary theory. Internationally, the association is not without precedent, as similar associations had already been set up in the United States and Europe.¹⁶ The president of the association was Dr Ferenc Jeszenszky, physicist and former university lecturer, until his death in 2011, followed in his position by chemical engineer Dr Ferenc Farkas.

Several Adventist theologians and pastors participated in this association and actively contributed to the organization of conferences and the writing of studies. In 2003, the association sent a public letter to the Hungarian Minister of Education, Bálint Magyar, asking that “Textbooks in primary, secondary, and higher education institutions should mention the shortcomings of evolutionary theory and present the alternative of a superior, intelligent creator as an alternative on a par with evolution.”¹⁷ It was also argued that education would thus fulfil the requirement of ideological neutrality and that – in case this did not happen – “education would remain trapped in the trap of ideological bias”.¹⁸

They also stated that it was not their aim to achieve the teaching of the tenets of any religion in schools (hence the letter does not contain any theological arguments). The letter also refers to the growing criticism worldwide of biology education that exclusively presents the theory of evolution. The reason given is that since Darwin’s work scientists have made a number of discoveries that call into question the possibility of spontaneous, gradual evolution. Among the signatories to the public letter were Calvinist pastor Ete Zoltán Sipos, Szeged-Csanád County Bishop Endre Gyulay, and historian László Tőkéczi. In 2004, the association published a volume entitled *Science Discovers God*, which includes several studies by members of the working group and a literature review in Hungarian and English.

¹⁶ For example, the Deluge Geology Society and the Creation Research Society. For details, see: NUMBERS 1993, 213–215.

¹⁷ TASI, István (ed.) (2004): *A tudomány felfedezi Istent. Intelligens tervezés – az evolúcióelmélet új riválisa* [Science is Discovering God. Intelligent Design – A New Rival to Evolutionary Theory]. Felsőörs, Aeternitas Kiadó. 21–22.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Attila Szabó (1956–), Adventist pastor and biology teacher, member of ÉRTEM, wrote three articles in this book. In his first paper, the author examines evolution from an ontological perspective, quoting Nobel Prize-winning microbiologist Salvador E. Luria, who summed up the essence of evolutionary theory as follows: “The essence of biology is evolution, and the essence of evolution is that it has neither a cause nor a goal.” He then goes on to write of his own struggles in this regard:

It was not easy to accept Darwin’s recognition that all that exists, the whole, ever-changing panorama of the living world, is determined by a purely statistical force that blindly governs: natural selection... When Darwin placed man within the overall framework of biological evolution, he dashed any hope that history had any immanent purpose. However unique a man’s consciousness may make him, his past and his future represent no more than the earthly career of a species. Existence therefore has no reason, no purpose, and no meaning.¹⁹

This quote points out that the theory of evolution raises important questions from an ideological point of view. If one accepts this theory, one becomes part of a purposeless and ultimately meaningless process – and this confronts us with the most serious questions.

Attila Szabó then uses quotes from several prominent Hungarian natural scientists (Albert Szent-Györgyi, Jenő Ernst, Tibor Gánti) to argue that there is a lot of randomness in the theory of evolution and to assume it requires a “faith” that is necessarily almost greater than the faith required to accept the biblical creation story.

In his second paper published in the volume *Science Is Discovering God*, Attila Szabó explores the question of ontogenesis and points out that we know very little about how it proceeds. According to the author’s definition, quoted from a university textbook, individual development refers to the irreversible changes in form, structure, and function that living individuals undergo from the beginning of their independent

¹⁹ LURIA, Salvador E. (1976): *Az élet befejezetlen kísérlet* (Original title: *Life: The Unfinished Experiment*). Transl. by Tibor Szilágyi. Budapest, Natura Kiadó. 1976. 25. Cited by: SZABÓ, Attila (2004a): *A fejlődéstudomány a véletlenről* [How Evolutionary Theory Views Coincidence]. In: TASI 2004, 135.

existence until death, and this has several periods.²⁰ He quotes, among others, Nobel Prize-winning geneticist Francois Jacob, who describes the speciality of the subject as follows:

What is particularly outrageous is the demonstration of how easy it is to tamper with the very material that is the basis of all life on this planet. The idea that we should regard as the result of some cosmic tinkering what remains our most perplexing problem and our most exciting tale seems particularly inexcusable: the formation of a human being, the process by which a sperm cell and an egg cell fuse, initiating the division of the egg cell, which becomes first two cells, then four, then a little ball, then a little bag. And somewhere in this growing body, a small group of cells will individualize and multiply until they form a mass of billions of nerve cells.²¹

The author's view, based on the insights of scientists, is that individual evolution itself is a mystery and that phylogeny (the natural process of evolution of living things) is itself a conjecture. As to why and how this process works, we know little more than nothing. This, in turn, means that we are leaving the realm of exact science, which means that it would be fairer to admit that scientists are guided not by facts but by probabilities and assumptions. The author argues in his paper that the relationship between conjectures should not be turned into a law.

In his third paper, Attila Szabó points out the pitfalls of the theory of evolution in the sense that as we study this theory and the related literature more and more deeply, on a scientific level, its uncertainties become more and more visible. In the case of popular science books and textbooks at the primary or secondary school levels, we find statements that seem to be absolutely certain, but when we read literature that is written in a scientific manner, we see the uncertainties that are not hidden by the scientists who work on the subject.

²⁰ MEGYERI, János – TÖRÖK, László – WÉBER, Mihály (1978): *Általános állattan*. Vol. 2. [*General Zoology*]. Budapest, Tankönyvkiadó. 336. Cited by: SZABÓ, Attila (2004b): *Az egyedfejlődés* [Ontogenesis]. In: TASI 2004, 153.

²¹ JACOB, François (1986): *A lehetséges és a tényleges valóság* (Original title: *The Possible and the Actual*. 1982). Transl. by Tibor Szilágyi. Budapest, Európa Kiadó. 91–92. Cited by: SZABÓ, Attila (2004b): *Az egyedfejlődés* [The Ontogenesis]. In: TASI 2004, 165.

Based on the ideas of Francois Jacob, quoted above, the author calls evolution a “modern myth” in the title of his paper, because some of its theorems are difficult to verify directly, and the theory provides a comprehensive explanation of the origin and history of the world. The Nobel Prize-winning geneticist argues that “...it seems that every culture, every society needs myths, including cosmological myths. It is easy to see how these myths can contribute to the cohesion of a group of people by providing a bond of shared belief in common origins and ancestry”.²² So, again, we are in the realm of belief: the main question is what man believes about the origin of the world – because we cannot reconstruct it.

In Attila Szabó’s writings, it can be observed that he does not want to address and make the reader think primarily as a theologian or an Adventist pastor but as a researcher in the field of natural science. In his arguments, he, therefore, always relies on the reasoning of natural scientists and on quotations from scientific literature.

The Work of the Theologian Zsuzsa Vankó

Zsuzsa Vankó (1945–), a college professor of theology, has explored the question of evolution and biblical creationism and their relationship to each other in several of her writings. As she was the Seventh-day Adventist theologian most concerned with this topic, we will discuss her work in more detail. In a study published in 2010, she seeks, inter alia, the answer to the question of whether “Darwin’s theory and the various evolutionary theories that have been developed further can be considered a scientific explanation of the natural world based on indisputable facts or merely a kind of world model.” In this regard, she quotes Barnabás Géczy, a palaeontologist and university professor, who states the following in his work *Lamarck and Darwin*.

Darwin’s theory is not only the summary and extension of observations made on his world travels but the result of very broad, bold, and independent reflections, in which philosophy and ethics played as much a part as psychology and anthropology... It is amazing how he was able to develop such a convincing theory from observations of such

²² Op. cit. 47–48. Cited by: SZABÓ, ATTILA (2004c): *Egy modern mítosz: az evolúció* [A Modern Myth: Evolution]. In: TASI 2004, 202.

different value and grounding... Darwin's work was published in a society fraught with tensions. The ruling class was in favour of free competition, the legitimacy of which it could see justified on a biological level... It is hardly a coincidence that the idea of selection originated in England, the most advanced capitalist country.²³

This quotation shows that Darwin had a much broader view of the reality around us than simply seeking a scientific explanation for the origin of life. Darwin's vision is therefore inseparable from the age in which he was born. That is why we can only understand it if we look at the theory of evolution in a broader context.

Zsuzsa Vankó (who holds a degree in theology from the Lutheran University of Theology) refers in this article, as well as in her study published in 2021, to the debate that took place in the Lutheran journal *Credo* in 2009. In this study, Edit Kézdy, a biology and chemistry teacher, and Péter Szentpétery (1956–), a Lutheran theologian, clashed over the question of whether evolutionary theory and biblical creationism can be harmonized. Zsuzsa Vankó considered it essential to follow the debate and take a position on this issue. This dialogue is instructive as to whether the two views can coexist. What made the debate particularly interesting was that the two debaters belonged to the same denomination, and Adventist theology tends to follow the changes in the theology of the larger Protestant denominations and the issues at stake.

Edit Kézdy argues that evolution and biblical creationism can be reconciled because “both [theories] investigate the same reality with different purposes and different means. (...) In the same way, a Christian believer can have in his/her mind the knowledge of evolutionary biology and the belief that the order of our world, with its wonderful natural laws and the human being in it belong to God the Creator.”²⁴ In his reply, Péter Szentpétery points out, among other things, that there is a difference between

²³ GÉCZY, Barnabás (1982): *Lamarck és Darwin* [Lamarck and Darwin]. Budapest, Magvető Kiadó. 97, 124–134. Cited by: VANKÓ, Zsuzsa (2010): Evolúciótan és bibliai teremtetés – alternatívát jelentenek, vagy harmóniába hozhatók? [Evolutionary Theory and Biblical Creationism – Are They Alternatives or Can They Be Brought into Harmony?]. In: *Sola Scriptura*. 2010/4. 6.

²⁴ KÉZDY, Edit (2009): Miért félünk Darwintól? 200 éve született Charles Darwin (1809–1882) [Why Are We Afraid of Darwin? Charles Darwin Was Born 200 Years Ago (1809–1882)]. In: *Credo*. 2009/1–2. 14.

the image of God presented to us in the Bible and the image of God “‘reconciled’ in one way or another with the world model developed in the wake of Darwin”, and that the two cannot be reconciled.²⁵

Zsuzsa Vankó argues in her cited studies that it is worthwhile to interview Darwin himself, to see how he thought about the question of God and whether he saw his own theory as compatible with the Scripture. The answer to the latter question is clearly *no*. Although Charles Darwin also studied theology and was himself much concerned with the question of God, his writings suggest that he had fundamentally abandoned faith by the end of his life (this is despite the fact that he was influenced by natural theology in his early years through William Paley).

Indeed, Zsuzsa Vankó refers to several writings by Péter Szentpétery, which give clear details from the originator of the theory of evolution. Darwin, in response to a question in a letter to him in 1879, said: “Science has nothing to do with Jesus Christ... As for myself, I do not believe that any revelation has ever been made. As far as the future life is concerned, everyone must choose for himself between conflicting, uncertain probabilities.”²⁶

Two years before his death, in 1880, Darwin made the following statement: “I regret to tell you that I do not believe in the Bible as divine revelation, and therefore do not believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God.”²⁷ On the concept of creation, he wrote: “I have long regretted having humbled myself before the public and used the term creation from the Pentateuch, by which I meant in fact that it appeared by a process wholly unknown to me.”²⁸

In this context, it is worth mentioning a quote from a recent volume, where an author also quotes Darwin himself. His own views were expressed by this scientist as follows: “It is difficult, almost impossible, to imagine that the vast and wonderful universe, human being and his ability to look into the past and see into the future, were created

²⁵ SZENTPÉTERY, Péter (2009b): Nem félek Darwintól, de fájdalmasan érint – Miért nem fogadják el sokan Darwin munkásságát és az arra épülő világmodellét? [I Am Not Afraid of Darwin, But It Hurts Me – Why Do So Many People Refuse to Accept Darwin’s Work and the World Model Based on It?]. In: *Credo*. 2009/3–4. 36.

²⁶ SZENTPÉTERY, Péter (2009a): Bocsánat, Mr. Darwin! A Darwin-évhez [Forgive Me, Mr Darwin! For the Darwin Year]. In: *Theológiai Szemle*. 2009/2. 92–93.

²⁷ SZENTPÉTERY 2009b, 32–33.

²⁸ SZENTPÉTERY 2009a, 93.

by blind chance, by necessity. So, I am compelled to believe that the ‘ultimate reason’ had an intelligent brain, similar in certain features to human being’s; I deserve the name of deist... For my part, I am content to call myself agnostic.”²⁹

On this background, taking into account Darwin’s self-definition quoted above, Zsuzsa Vankó argues that the ideas of creationism and evolutionism cannot be reconciled from the perspective of either evolutionary theory or the Bible (see below the justification of the latter). Adventist theology has been consistent in this regard and has rejected theistic evolution from the beginning.

In his habilitation thesis, Péter Szentpétery points out that the so-called theistic theory of evolution was born very soon after the publication of Charles Darwin’s famous work, *The Origin of Species* (1859). As early as the 1860s, Asa Gray, one of Darwin’s most important early American followers (and a correspondent), expressed the conviction that belief in God and evolution could be reconciled.³⁰ Gray’s explicit aim was to persuade scientists who accepted evolution not to follow atheism but to reckon with the existence of God as creator.³¹

Over time, the vast majority of Christian denominations accepted the theistic theory of evolution,³² but this has led to a number of problems. Péter Szentpétery defines

²⁹ Darwin, Charles (1973): *A fajok eredete természetes kiválasztás útján vagy a létért való küzdelemben előnyhöz jutott fajták fennmaradása*. (Original title: *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*. 1859). Transl. by Lajos Mikes – Gabriella Prekop. Budapest, Magyar Helikon. 636. Cited by: FARKAS, Péter (2022): *Darwin istenhite [Darwin’s Faith in God]*. In: Barla, Ferenc – Könyvid, István – Szabó, Péter: *Az evolúció mint Isten teremtő logikája [Evolution as the Creative Logic of God]*. Győr, Szent Mór Perjelség. 37.

³⁰ The relationship between Darwin and Asa Gray is described in detail in the book by David N. Livingstone. See Livingstone 1997, 62–64.

³¹ SZENTPÉTERY, Péter (2008): *Omnia sunt per facta ipsum. Darwin hatása a teremtéshitre – teológiai és emberi kérdések [Omnia sunt per facta ipsum. Darwin’s impact on creationism – theological and human issues]*. Private edition (with the support of the Lutheran Theological University). 124–125.

³² It should be noted that after the emergence of the theory of evolution, there were theologians who strongly rejected Darwin’s theory, including Charles Hodge, the Presbyterian theologian who led Princeton Theological Seminary from 1851 to 1878. He summarily described evolution as atheism. See LIVINGSTONE 2014, 159.

theistic evolutionism as “the most common form of reconciling the biblical belief in creation with the current scientific model of the world. Many Christians profess to have no problem with this... The majority of theologians in the historic churches treat the evolutionary view of history as fact. They, therefore, interpret the biblical accounts in this light.”³³ In her study published in 2021, Zsuzsa Vankó, in agreement with Szentpétery, points out the possible pitfalls of reconciling the two theories by quoting several biblical verses:

“Theistic evolutionism, therefore, denies not only that God personally created every detail and every living thing in the created world, but also, as a logical necessity, that God’s work is a continuous sustaining work. Yet, we read such a statement in the pages of the Old Testament: ‘If he set his heart upon man, if he gather unto himself his spirit and his breath; All flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust’ (Job 34:14–15 KJV).”³⁴

In this paper, Zsuzsa Vankó argues that the idea of theistic evolutionism is not consistent from the perspective of biblical systematic theology. Not only in the Old Testament but also in the New Testament we can read statements with similar content: “Jesus also spoke in the present tense about God ‘mak[ing] his sun to rise on the evil and on the good and send rain on the just and the unjust.’ (Matt 5:45 KJV) Elsewhere in the New Testament, we read that God is ‘upholding all things by the word of his power’ (Heb 1:3 KJV).”³⁵ Creation and sustenance are, therefore, inseparable on the basis of the testimony of the biblical verses, and this is a basic tenet of Seventh-day Adventist biblical teaching.

In addition, God’s infinite wisdom is also spoken of in several biblical verses, including Isaiah and Jeremiah. “Don’t you know? Haven’t you heard? The LORD is the eternal God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not grow tired or weary; and his understanding cannot be fathomed” (Isa 40:28 ISV). “The LORD is the one who made the world by his power, who established the earth by his wisdom and

³³ Szentpétery 2008, 482–483.

³⁴ VANKÓ, Zsuzsa (2021): Hézagpótló isteneszme, vagy élő, teremtő Isten? A teista evolúciótan és a bibliai teremtés [A Substitute God Theory or a Living, Creative God? Theistic Evolution and Biblical Creationism]. In: Vankó, Zsuzsa (ed.): *Istenképek és az „élő Isten”* [Images of God and the “Living God”]. Biatorbágy, Spalding Kiadó. 24.

³⁵ Ibid.

stretched out the heavens by his understanding” (Jer 10:12 ISV). This is crucial because the Scripture always relates God’s creative power to God’s infinite wisdom. Zsuzsa Vankó claims the following in this context: “There is no revelation about how creation works, and such a thing is indeed inconceivable on the basis of the laws of nature as we know them now. God’s word of command may work – in today’s familiar terms – like a code. This is not to explain the inexplicable for us at present but merely to illustrate that, counting on God’s infinite wisdom, it is not so inconceivable.”³⁶

It is also crucial that theistic evolutionism is also incompatible with many other biblical ideas. According to Zsuzsa Vankó, the idea of theistic evolution is incompatible with sin as a historical event, with the fact that the cause of death is sin (Rom 5:12), and with the fact that the Bible calls death “the enemy” (1 Cor 15:26). The evolutionary process is governed by the law of natural selection, where death is in a sense indispensable, and even promotes evolution. In Zsuzsa Vankó’s opinion, “the whole system of Christian thought collapses: hamartiology, soteriology, the whole doctrine of salvation. Christ’s redemptive work, his deliverance from sin and death, becomes meaningless (...) Theistic evolutionism is incompatible with Christian eschatology, too.”³⁷

Zsuzsa Vankó also quotes Nobel Prize-winning physicist Alfred Kastler, who was also disturbed by the incompatibility of Darwinian theory and Christian redemption theory. Kastler is frank about his struggles with this issue and refers to another world-renowned Nobel Prize-winning theologian and physician, Albert Schweitzer, who was preoccupied with the same ideas:

The purpose of the life of certain beings is based on sending other beings to death, which also have the same purpose... Where is the divine love of which Christ speaks? These questions are profoundly disturbing, and I know that my compatriot Albert Schweitzer was also disturbed, without his faith being affected, and this is the most terrible question for me. There can be no compromise between Darwin’s God, the creator of the world, who imposed on creatures the implacable and inexorable law of selection, and the loving God of Jesus.³⁸

³⁶ Op. cit. 25.

³⁷ Op. cit. 26–27.

³⁸ KASTLER, Alfred (1980): *Az a különös anyag* (Original title: *Cette Étrange Matière*. 1976). Transl. by Károly Ladányi. Budapest, Gondolat Kiadó. 268. Cited by: VANKÓ 2021, 27.

So, as one can see, the theory of evolution can raise serious questions even among the greatest thinkers and scientists. In her 2023 article, Zsuzsa Vankó points out, among other things – as already indicated in the quoted thoughts of Barnabás Géczy –, that the idea of evolution was not based on scientific observations alone, but that the influence of the spirit of the age and certain speculative ideas also played a role in its creation. On a purely scientific basis, it is undecided whether the principle of uniformism, as conceived by Charles Lyell and which inspired much of Darwin's theory of evolution, or catastrophism is right – that is, whether human life has evolved gradually over millions and billions of years, or whether the Bible's description of creation *ex nihilo*, the fall and the flood can be taken as true.

According to Adventist theological thinking, from beginning to end, the biblical record is consistent in its support of the latter. Moreover, in the letter of the apostle Peter, we read a remarkable prophecy: "In the last days... they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water" (2Pet 3:3.5 KJV). Against this background, Zsuzsa Vankó asks the question, "What is the motive, the subjective reason why people deliberately reject the biblical doctrine of creation directly accomplished by God, by a unique divine power?" Her answer is that "self-centred man wants to be autonomous out of a visceral instinct. Man also finds it difficult to give the first place to God, the creator of all things, and to recognize Him as superior to himself. Man reveres and worships created things rather than the Creator (Rom 1:25)." ³⁹ This is in line with the idea of Péter Szentpétery, who says that the reason for the "vehement rejection of short-term models of the origin of the world is that the Creator comes within reach and cannot be evaded". ⁴⁰

Conclusions

Seventh-day Adventist theological thought in Hungary can be said to be unified in the sense that the theologians we have studied consistently argue in favour of the

³⁹ VANKÓ, Zsuzsa (2023): *Alapvető emberi kérdéseink – bibliai válaszok. Biblikus rendszeres teológia* [Fundamental Human Questions – Biblical Answers. Biblical Systematic Theology]. Biatorbágy, Spalding Kiadó. 381–382.

⁴⁰ SZENTPÉTERY 2009b, 37–38.

theory of creation in their works, and also consider it necessary to point out that no reconciliation with the theory of evolution is possible on an ideological, biblical basis. It is also noticeable that they do not enter into scientific debates since, in their view, neither the process of creation nor the theory of evolution can be reconstructed or reproduced. In this sense, therefore, Hungarian Adventist theological thought is not creationist since it does not aim to prove the theory of creation by means of natural scientific tools at all costs – since it is not considered necessary. However, it is thought-provoking that the foundations of evolutionary thinking, which is based on the principle of continuous development, and the view of history based on it are beginning to falter today, as many leading natural scientists publish their devastating diagnoses of the state of the Earth and the serious problems of earthly civilization, which many consider to be insoluble – but this could be the subject of another study.

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