

ADVENTISM AND THE WARFARE BETWEEN SCIENCE AND THE BIBLE

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THE QUESTION

One of the greatest intellectual battles of all time has been the warfare between science and the Bible. This controversy, which has been intense for centuries, shows no signs of relenting.

Science is a much-admired enterprise, and it should be! Its accomplishments are very impressive: with genetic engineering we can make plants that glow in the dark, or we can divide the early embryonic stage of man to produce an identical twin. We can preserve that early stage and develop it many years later into almost a clone. We can build electronic chips less than an inch square containing more than a million functional electronic units. On these chips we can now build tiny motors that are only $\frac{3}{1000}$ of an inch in diameter. Sometimes such accomplishments make it difficult for us to recognize its limitations, and one of the mindsets of the 20th century is that science is far and above other systems of thought.

The current scientific worldview maintains that the Bible is in error. Specifically, it states that creation by God in six days a few thousand years ago did not occur. Science proposes a long process of evolution for the development of life forms in which God is not a factor. These ideas of science have permeated many other areas of inquiry, such as psychology, geography, sociology, and theology.

To many science is unquestionably correct, yet many others believe in some kind of creator God. Many are dissatisfied with the concept that all of reality is as simple as science purports. Science has never satisfied questions such as the origin of consciousness (mind), concepts of good and evil, or free will. To many there is ample evidence of something beyond science.

The Bible has long been revered as the Word of God. While the secularization of the last two centuries has taken its toll, the popularity of the Bible remains head and shoulders above all other books. Current distribution of the Bible or New Testament exceed 127 million copies per year. Over the years the American Bible Society has published over five billion copies of the Bible or parts thereof. The only close competition has been the red booklet of quotations from Mao Zedong, with an estimated 800 million copies. Circulation was enhanced when possession became virtually mandatory in China. Christianity, which is based on the Bible, represents about $\frac{1}{3}$ of the world population (Muslims $\frac{1}{6}$, non-religious $\frac{1}{6}$, atheists $\frac{1}{20}$).¹ Hence, while there is impressive respect for science, there is also significant reverence for the Bible, and many wonder which is correct.

SCIENTIFIC DATA AND CREATION

While science has felt free to deny the factuality of the biblical creation model, it has failed to produce a workable model of its own for the origin of life. The problem has become especially acute in the past two decades, when the complexities of even the simplest organisms has been discovered to be so immense that the organization of life by itself cannot be reconciled with our basic knowledge of chemistry, physics, and probability.

Other problems have also surfaced, and a plethora of scientific literature questioning various aspects of evolution have been published by scientists who do not believe in creation. Examples include:

Francis Crick, 1981, *Life Itself: Its Origin and Nature*.² This Nobel Laureate acknowledges that the problems of life originating here on Earth are so great that it must have arisen elsewhere in the universe.

Francis Hitching, 1982, *The Neck of the Giraffe: Where Darwin Went Wrong*.³ Hitching also rejects creation, but poses serious problems for evolution.

Robert Shapiro, 1986, *Origins: A Skeptic's Guide to the Creation of Life on Earth*.⁴ Shapiro has faith in science and hopes that it will be able to formulate a plausible model.

Gordon Rattray Taylor, 1983, *The Great Evolution Mystery*.⁵ This noted science writer, who believes in evolution, poses many challenging questions for evolution.

Michael Denton, 1985, *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*.⁶ This Australian scientist lightly dismisses creation as a myth, yet states:

Ultimately the Darwinian theory of evolution is no more nor less than the great cosmogenic myth of the twentieth century. Like the Genesis based cosmology which it replaced, and like the creation myths of ancient man, it satisfies the same deep psychological need for an all embracing explanation for the origin of the world which has motivated all the cosmogenic myth makers of the past, from the shamans of primitive peoples to the ideologues of the medieval church (p. 358).

Søren Løvtrup, 1987, *Darwinism: The Refutation of a Myth*.⁷ This Swedish embryologist, who believes in some form of evolution by major steps, states:

I believe that one day the Darwinian myth will be ranked the greatest deceit in the history of science. When this happens many people will pose the question: How did this ever happen? The present text surveys some of the answers which have been given, but there is no reason to believe that we have yet reached the final one. There will be a lot of work to do for coming generations of historians of biology (p. 422).

It should be noted that much of the argumentation within science is not directed at the general concept of evolution. While still clinging to evolution, science has failed to provide a plausible mechanism for the process. A significant amount of the criticism is directed especially at Darwinism, and it has almost become fashionable in scientific circles to criticize Darwin's "survival-of-the-fittest" concept.

These references, which are only a small sample of the literature available on this topic, illustrate the turmoil occurring in biology. Despite the absence of a workable model for evolution, scientific thought is shying away from any alternatives such as creation, since the concept of a God is not

acceptable in current scientific thinking. God was part of scientific interpretation when the foundations of modern science were laid down several centuries ago, but that is no longer the case.

For a better understanding of various ideas about origins, we will give a brief introduction to the geologic column. This column represents, among other things, a fossil sequence of plant or animal remains in the formations of Earth's crust which is evidence of past life and, as such, is very pertinent to interpretations of the origin of life.

THE GEOLOGIC COLUMN

The main portion (in terms of volume) of the geologic column -- the Phanerozoic -- contains sediments with relatively abundant, unquestioned fossils. The Phanerozoic forms about two-thirds of the total volume of sediments. In the lower third (the Precambrian), the fossils in the sediments are very rare and/or questionable. The kinds of fossils found in the various levels of the sedimentary layers are sometimes unique to their position in the geologic column. For instance, sponge-like Archeociathids are found only in the lower part of the Phanerozoic; grasses and man are found only in the upper part. Fossils such as the lamp shell *Lingula* are found throughout. The simple vascular plants called Psilophytes are found only at the bottom and as living representatives. The presence of fossils in the sediments varies greatly. Usually none, or only a few, are found; in rare cases they are extremely abundant.

There are many kinds of fossils -- estimates of the number of different species vary greatly but often run into the millions. Because of problems in variation and identification, the number of fossil species should not be equated with the number of living species. There are probably many more fossil species than true "biological" species.

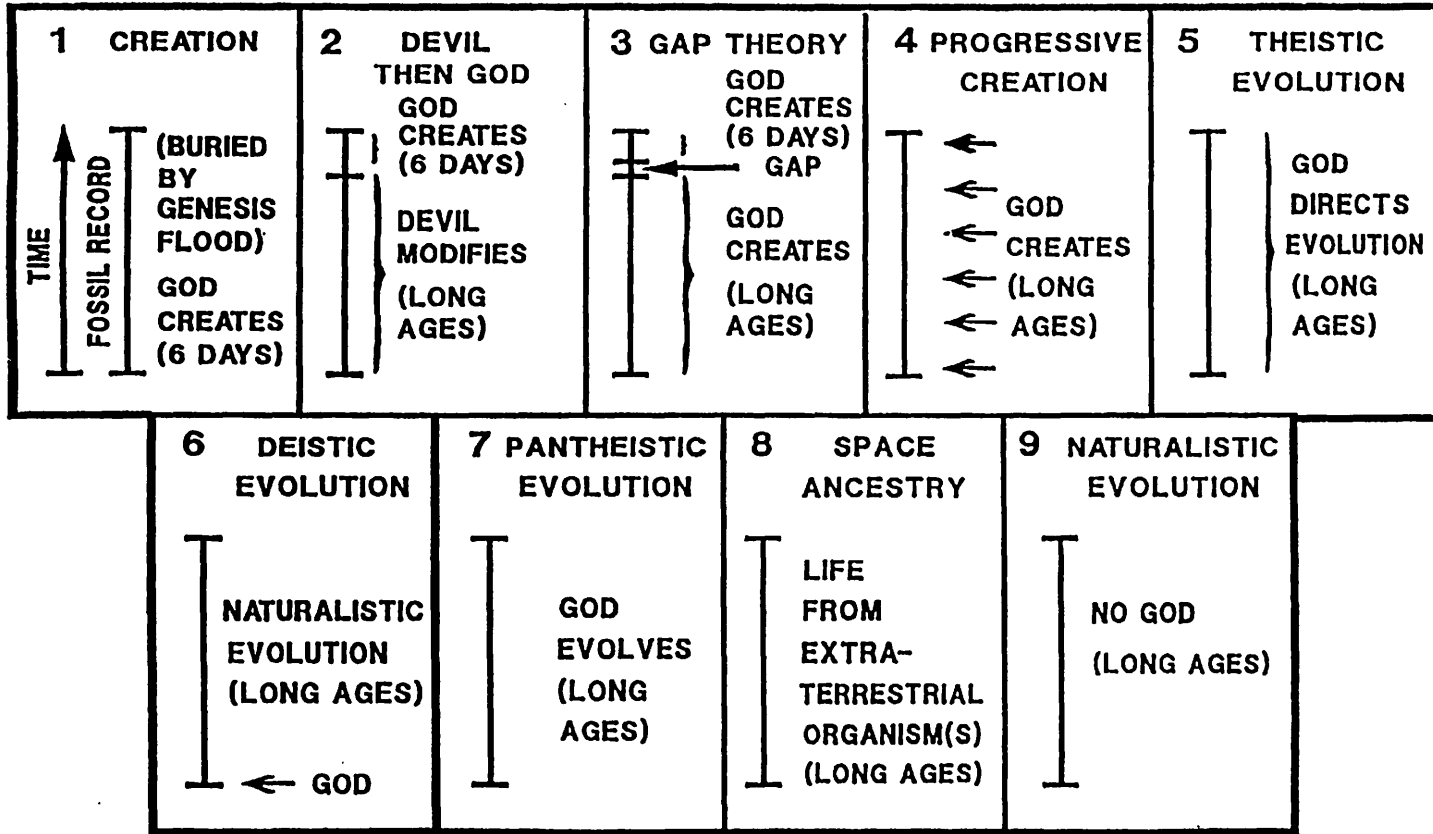
At the opposite ends of the spectrum of interpretations of the fossil record stand *creation* and *naturalistic evolution*. The former holds to the idea that the fossils represent remains of life created by God during creation week and buried during the Genesis flood; the latter views them as the product of purely naturalistic processes resulting from gradual evolution over millions of years. These and other proposed *intermediate views* will be considered.

At present, the intermediate views of origins are the most popular among Christian churches. They are appealing because they permit acceptance of varying degrees of evolutionary theory while still preserving the concept of God's involvement in creation. These intermediate views can be adopted only by yielding a significant degree of scriptural integrity to the concepts of evolutionary interpretation while still including God. These also require abandonment of the purely naturalistic explanations usually presented in science texts. Since all these intermediate views reduce the significance of the literal six-day creation week and the seventh-day Sabbath, they are of particular concern to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which places great emphasis on the Sabbath as a memorial of creation week.

COMMENTS ON VARIOUS INTERPRETATIONS

Figure 1 is a chart representing nine different interpretations of the fossil record, beginning with creation and ending with naturalistic evolution. These are arranged in a sequence that represents an

INTERPRETATIONS OF THE GEOLOGIC COLUMN



increasing trend towards naturalism and departure from the Genesis account of creation. While these trends apply in a general way, the specific arrangement of some is debatable. At the left of each interpretation is a vertical line representing the geologic column, with comments on the way in which the column fits into various interpretations. The bottom of the line represents the lowest or oldest layers, the top the highest or youngest. Numerous ideas and intermediates between these nine interpretations could also be black-and-white issues, but with shades of grey – sometimes very close shades. Unfortunately, these various concepts are vague and sometimes ill-defined. There is no standard terminology associated with many, but an attempt has been made to use commonly accepted terms. References related to some of the concepts or use of terms have been included.

1. CREATION (also called special creation or fiat creation)

Description of Model -- This is the most direct reading of Scripture. Creation occurred in six literal days with a short period of time (compared to the geologic time scale of millions of years) between creation and the flood and a relatively short period since then. Earth and life upon it were created "in the beginning" (Gen 1:1-2), and the flood was the major catastrophe that produced most of the fossiliferous sedimentary layers on Earth's surface. Present estimates of sedimentation rates of a few centimeters per thousand years would not allow for much sediment production before or after the flood, although at the end of the flood and in subsequent years, sedimentation was probably much more rapid because Earth's crust was more in disequilibrium. The model fits well, among other things, with the significant degree of design and orderliness that is found in nature.

A variation of this model postulates that God created the fossils as such *in situ*. This idea has no general acceptance at present. One reason for its rejection is the contradiction between the good and truthful God described in the Bible and the trickery implied in making fake fossils.

Problems – The model disagrees with several scientific *interpretations* that specify long ages, especially radiometric dating, rate of cooling of magmatic (molten rock) bodies, rate of formation of fossil reefs, and rate of growth of successive fossil forests.

2. DEVIL, THEN GOD

Description of Model -- Being jealous of God, the Devil brought germs of life from elsewhere to Earth and tried to imitate God's creative power. Most of the geologic column was developed over long ages before creation week, and the organisms in it were the result of satanic experimentation. Afterwards, the Genesis creation week took place but was only a local creation; hence, the nature that we see about us represents a mixture of God's creation and the Devil's work. This model explains the apparent occurrence of evil, in the form of cruel, predatory organisms, in the lower (early) parts of the fossil record before man who appears in the upper (later) part.

Problems -- This particular model excludes the prevailing scriptural concept of God as the all-inclusive Creator (Gen 1 & 2; Ex 20:11 & 31:17; Neh 9:6; Psa 146:6; Isa 40:26, 38; Jn 1:3; Acts 4:24; and Col 1:16). God did not create all. [While the Bible does suggest change (degeneration, Rom 8:22) which is attributed to sin, the Devil is not considered as a major creator.] The model is also contrary

to Moses' description of an original world that was dark (light is necessary for most life) and void before creation (Gen 1:2). There is no *direct* scientific, scriptural, or other evidence for the idea itself. Related evidence can be gathered, but it usually also fits other models. Any discovery about past life can be attributed to the capriciousness of the Devil. Such a concept is unsatisfying because it is not easily testable. As an example, it is difficult to test the idea that we were created only fifteen minutes ago with a fully mature environment complete with past memories. We tend to reject such models because we suspect that reality, as judged by the testable parts, is not that capricious.

3. THE GAP THEORY⁸ (also called Ruin and Restoration)

Description of Model -- Life was created by God on Earth in the distant past; however, He destroyed that life following a judgment upon Satan. This was followed by the creation described in Genesis 1-2. The *Scofield Reference Bible* refers to this in connection with Genesis 1:2⁹ which says that Earth was a waste place, and with Isaiah 45:18¹⁰ which says that God did not create Earth as a waste place. The argument is that Earth must have become a waste place (ruined) subsequent to an ancient creation not described in Genesis.

Problems -- As with the previous model, the idea is difficult to evaluate and to test, since a great variety of data can be fitted into the concept. It has little scientific or scriptural support. There is no evidence of a worldwide gap in the fossil record. If there had been a gap (ruin), a distinct blank period (gap) in the fossil record should be evident on a worldwide basis prior to a subsequent creation.

4. PROGRESSIVE CREATION¹¹ (the 'Day-Age theory,' in which each day of creation represents long ages, also fits into this model)

Description of Model -- God performed multiple creation events over long periods of time. The degree of progression that is found from bottom to top in the fossil record reflects degrees of progress in creative acts. It fits with both the evidence of gaps in the fossil record, which support creation, and the idea of long ages in the geologic column.

Problems -- Neither science nor Scripture suggests directly that events occurred this way; therefore, the basic idea itself is unsatisfying because it lacks support. It is difficult to test. It disallows a six-day, all-inclusive creation; however, God is still the Creator of all things. The presence of predation (e.g., the carnivorous dinosaur *Tyrannosaurus rex*) earlier in the fossil record makes evil, in the form of predation, appear before the advent of man. This negates the Genesis story of a good Creator and a good creation followed by the fall of man and the consequent evil that ensued. The model implies many errors or failures by God over long periods of time before the advent of evil. Thousands of important taxa at various levels in the fossil record are not now living on Earth's surface. Dobzhansky,¹² while criticizing belief in creation, emphasizes the problem of species extinction: ". . . but what a senseless operation it would have been, on God's part, to fabricate a multitude of species ex nihilo and then let most of them die out!" Progressive creation raises this question without providing a good explanation. A God who would create by this method can be postulated, but He would not be the omniscient God described in the Bible. Genesis explains these extinct organisms on the basis of major destruction of Earth's surface at the time of the Noachian flood because of man's sin.

5. THEISTIC EVOLUTION¹³ (also called 'teleological evolution' by Marsh.¹⁴ Modifications of this view, placing special emphasis on the creation and nature of man, have been proposed by Teilhard de Chardin¹⁵ and Bube.¹⁶ The latter calls his idea 'biblical evolutionism.')

Description of Model -- God directed the continuous progress of evolution from simple to complex. The idea fits fairly easily with many concepts of the general theory of evolution and still permits God's activity. Also, God is available to bridge some of the difficult barriers that evolution faces, e.g., the problem of the origin of life; the gaps in the fossil record; the development of complex, integrated, biological systems; and the origin of the higher mental characteristics of man.

Problems -- The gaps in the fossil record do not suggest a continuous process of evolution. The model seems demeaning to God in contrast to the all-powerful Creator described in the Bible. Here, He seems to use the crutch of evolution to produce advanced forms. The problem of numerous created errors implied by extinct taxa (see Model 4 above) and the slow progress and competition implied in an evolutionary model challenge God's creative power, knowledge, and goodness. Competition seems out of character with the God described in the Bible who does not forget the sparrow (Lk 12:6) and whose ideal for life includes the lion and the lamb living peacefully together (Isa 11:6 & 65:25). As is the case for progressive creation, there is also a logical difficulty with the appearance of evil in nature before the fall of man.

6. DEISTIC EVOLUTION¹⁷

Description of Model -- This model has sometimes also been called theistic evolution. Here, God starts life, then naturalistic evolution takes over without God's help, and naturalistic processes produce advanced forms of life. This particular model solves the problem of the origin of life on Earth, which is perhaps the most difficult problem confronting evolution.¹⁸

Problems -- The problems outlined above for theistic evolution apply here also, to which one can add many of the problems faced by naturalistic evolution without the help of God. For instance, how would inept, intermediate stages survive while changing from one functional type to another? The forelimb of an organism evolving into a wing (to make a bird) in its inept, intermediate stage would not provide a good organ for running nor for flying. Such major changes that have detrimental intermediates are difficult to justify in the economy of the evolutionary process.

Because the function of a personal God is abridged, it is more difficult to conceive of the origin of those higher characteristics of man (e.g., love, morality, concern, and freedom of choice) which are difficult to explain on a naturalistic basis.

7. PANTHEISTIC EVOLUTION¹⁹

Description of Model -- God progresses with evolution. It is a more naturalistic evolutionary philosophy than the previous case, in that God Himself is evolving. Nevertheless, He is still God.

Problems -- The problems are the same as those given for the previous model. In addition, it is highly demeaning to the concept of God's greatness as described in the Bible. There are no direct data in either Scripture or science to indicate that this is God's past history.

8. SPACE ANCESTRY²⁰

Description of Model -- Under this heading can be included a variety of ideas that have gained some popularity in the past two decades. Basically, they conceive of extraterrestrial life-forms originating or modifying terrestrial life. Some of these ideas postulate that only simple life was passively transferred to Earth, while others postulate direct transfer or even hybridization between superbeings and earthly organisms to produce more advanced forms of life. Such models solve some of the problems of naturalistic evolution by invoking the use of organisms from outer space. One is not bound to terrestrial limitations for the origin of life.

Problems -- Probably the most serious problem of these models is the same as for many of the others presented above -- namely, a lack of support for the ideas themselves. While they can solve many problems, the high degree of conjecture invoked makes them unattractive. Also, there is some doubt regarding the facilitation of organismal interplanetary space travel by special, unprotected naturalistic means. Pushing the origin of life to some remote location in the universe does not help materially to provide an adequate explanation for its origin. The problems of spontaneously developing a complex, living system occur anywhere.

9. NATURALISTIC EVOLUTION²¹ (also called evolution,²² atheistic evolution, or mechanistic evolution)²³

Description of Model -- The various forms of life have developed strictly as a result of the operation of natural law. This idea suits those who limit the concept of reality to tangible, natural laws. No intelligent design or supernaturalism is involved.

Problems -- This model does not answer important questions such as the following: How do very complex life systems originate on Earth without a designer? How do inept, intermediate forms survive the competition of naturalistic evolution? How can one bridge the gaps in the fossil record? How can man's higher characteristics such as consciousness, free will, and love originate in a purely mechanistic system?

CONTEMPORARY BELIEFS

In the light of the above models of origins, it is interesting that a 1982 Gallup poll representing adults in the United States reveals the surprising results that only 9% believe in naturalistic evolution (Model 9), 38% believe that God was instrumental in the evolutionary process (Models 4 and 5), 44% believe that man was created by God within the last 10,000 years (probably Model 1), and 9% did not know. A 1986 survey in California, Connecticut, and Texas indicates that $\frac{1}{4}$ of college students believe in creation.

Comparison of the various ideas proposed above with current beliefs in Adventism would be very useful. Unfortunately, no firm data are available. Published statements by Adventists, seminar discussions, and statements released to the press by Adventists indicate that alternatives to creation (Model 1) are being given serious consideration in some Adventist circles.

RELATION OF VARIOUS INTERPRETATIONS ABOUT ORIGINS TO THE BIBLE

None of the nine interpretations of origins discussed above, except the creation model, have good biblical support. Models 2 - 9 suggest progress, while the Bible speaks of degeneration (cf Rom 8:22 with Gen 1:31). That several involve the concept of a God is often their only serious link to Scripture. The Bible describes a short creation period (Gen 1 & 2) of six literal days a few thousand years ago that produced all the basic forms of life. Long ages are not suggested for this process. Also, original Earth is described as empty and dark (Gen 1:2). Since light is necessary for many of the forms of life found throughout the fossil record, the concept of an extended period for the development of advanced forms before creation week is not entertained.

Those who adopt one of the intermediate views between creation and naturalistic evolution often assume the first part of Genesis to be allegorical. It is frequently stated that the message of Genesis is that God is Creator, while the factuality of the account is doubted. One wonders how long such a message can be taken seriously, if it is asserted to be based on erroneous information. An allegorical approach undermines the Bible as a whole, because the leading Bible personalities, either directly or by implication, refer to Genesis 1-11 as factual. Their testimony supports the truthfulness of the biblical account of beginnings. Some examples follow:

PETER

2 Peter 3:3-7: *First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, Where is this coming he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation. But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and with water. By water also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.*

1 Peter 3:20: *. . . who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water. . . .*

PAUL

1 Corinthians 15:22, 45: *For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. So it is written: The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.*

Hebrews 11:7: *By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.*

CHRIST

Matthew 19:4 : *Haven't you read, he replied, that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female, . . .*

Matthew 24:37–39 : *As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.*

GOD

Exodus 20:11 : *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. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.*

Isalah 54:9 : *To me this is like the days of Noah, when I swore that the waters of Noah would never again cover the earth. So now I have sworn not to be angry with you, never to rebuke you again.*

If you believe in the biblical account of beginnings, you are in the good company of Peter, Paul, Christ, and God. It would be a strange god who would create over millions of years and then ask us to keep the seventh-day Sabbath as a memorial of his creating all in six days. It would likewise be a strange god who would allow his prophets to be deceived for millennia on the all-important question of beginnings, only to wait for James Hutton and Charles Darwin to give us the correct picture of beginnings.

There is no way to reconcile the biblical account of beginnings with the long geological ages.

RELATION OF INTERPRETATIONS TO WRITINGS OF ELLEN G. WHITE

All the interpretations proposed above, except creation, involve long ages for the development of life. Ellen G. White clearly does not support these ideas:

The sophistry in regard to the world being created in an indefinite period of time is one of Satan's falsehoods. God speaks to the human family in language they can comprehend. He does not leave the matter so indefinite that human beings can handle it according to their theories.²⁴

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.²⁵

These, to free themselves of difficulties thrown in their way by infidel geologists, adopt the view that the six days of creation were six vast, indefinite periods, and the day of God's rest was another indefinite period; making senseless the fourth commandment of God's holy law.²⁶

Ellen White also expresses concern about a trend away from God Himself after one departs from the Bible. She states:

Those who doubt the reliability of the records of the Old and New Testaments too often go a step further and doubt the existence of God and attribute infinite power to nature. Having let go their anchor, they are left to beat about upon the rocks of infidelity.²⁷

The sequence of the nine interpretations given above illustrates how one can gradually follow a pattern away from God.

RELATION OF A SIX-DAY CREATION TO TIME IN THE FOSSIL RECORD

It is seldom appreciated that if one conceives of a significant amount of time for any part of the fossil record, one precludes the concept of an all-inclusive, six-day creation as given in Genesis 1 & 2; Exodus 20:11 & 31:17. If there are millions of years in the fossil record, all of creation could not have occurred in six days, since many parts of the geologic column contain unique fossil kinds. This uniqueness combined with the non-uniqueness expected of the process of fossilization seems to exclude the concept of an all-inclusive, six-day creation, if much time is put into the fossil record.

The degree of uniqueness of fossils found in the geologic column is explained by evolutionists as evolutionary changes occurring over long periods of time. It is explained by creationists on the basis of factors related to the Genesis flood. These include: (1) an original, well-ordered, unique ecology buried by gradually rising waters; (2) sorting by water currents; (3) faster motility of larger organisms; and (4) sorting in water by density.

It is also interesting to note that the present process of accumulation of sediments on Earth's surface is very slow, averaging at best less than one meter per thousand years (most estimates are much lower but are indirect and based on an assumed age for Earth). Biblical history does not allow much time either before or after the flood for the accumulation of very much sediment under normal conditions. The large volume of sediment on Earth's surface is a further reason, when in a biblical context, for placing most of the fossil record in the flood.

RELATION OF MODELS TO DRIFTING PATTERNS OF THOUGHT

The influence of the intermediate views given above on the beliefs of many Christian churches has been considerable. Since the popularization of the theory of evolution during the past century, many

denominations have in some way accommodated to various ideas of the progressive development of life over long ages. It is disappointing to see churches, which usually place a very high priority on "established" truth, change their beliefs; yet this occurs, often slowly and insidiously.

H. Richard Niebuhr²⁸ has outlined the traditional history of a religious group. After being organized by the original reformers, the character of the sect is soon changed as a new generation of children is born. This new generation rarely has the fervor of its fathers who fashioned their "convictions in the heat of the conflict." Succeeding generations find isolation from the world more difficult. Wealth and culture accrue as compromise of the original purposes brings in the usual churchy type of morals. Soon the new group becomes a traditional church.

This traditional church is more a social structure than the originally intended instrument for reform. Managerial requirements increasingly distract the church's efforts from religious matters.

Ellen G. White refers to the pattern of "drifting" in churches:

Has not the same process been repeated in nearly every church calling itself Protestant? As the founders, those who possessed the true spirit of reform, pass away, their descendants come forward and 'new-model the cause.' While blindly clinging to the creed of their fathers and refusing to accept any truth in advance of what they saw, the children of the reformers depart widely from their example of humility, self-denial, and renunciation of the world. Thus 'the first simplicity disappears.' A worldly flood, flowing into the church, carries 'with it its customs, practices, and idols.'²⁹

This traditional sociological pattern of drifting away from the Bible and God is also illustrated in biblical history. Repeatedly, God had to use drastic means in attempts to reverse these trends. Such incidents as the Genesis flood, the long sojourn of the Israelites in the desert, and the Babylonian Captivity illustrate both the difficulty and importance of resisting such trends and maintain faith in God and the Bible.

Modern educational institutions also illustrate this tendency to drift. A large number of institutions of higher learning in the United States (e.g., Auburn University, Boston University, Brown, Dartmouth, Harvard, Princeton, Rutgers, Tufts, the University of Southern California, Wesleyan University, Wichita State University, and Yale) began as religious, church-related institutions but have since moved well down the path of secularization and are no longer church-related. It is significant that (at least to the best of my knowledge) no institution has begun as secular and then became religious. Since the present philosophy of education is basically secular, this trend is not surprising.

In referring to higher education in the mainline churches, the 22 May 1989 issue of *Time* reports:

A century ago, most U.S. colleges and universities were controlled by mainline Protestantism and constituted the faith's most important channel of cultural influence. But gradually, mainline schools have become indistinguishable from

secular campuses, leaving distinctly Protestant higher education to the Evangelicals. This 'revolution' occurred with 'nobody noticing and nobody seeming to mind,' remarks Duke University historian George Marsden.

DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

The issue of creation and evolution is much more important to the Seventh-day Adventist Church than to most other churches. This is because of our belief in the seventh-day Sabbath as a memorial of creation and our confidence that the Bible is the Word of God.

In Adventism the issue between science and the Bible presently centers mainly on the question of time required for creation. Did it occur in six literal days, or over thousands to millions of years? The issue is not especially over the age of the matter of the earth, or if creation was six or seven (or more) thousand years ago, nor is the issue over evolution versus creation per se. However, creation viewed in the framework of long time periods is not as isolated from evolution as might be at first surmised. The former has sometimes led to the latter, especially in European schools of thought.

Ellen White emphasizes the importance of creation and the insidiousness of alternative views:

But the assumption that the events of the first week required thousands upon thousands of years, strikes directly at the foundation of the fourth commandment. It represents the Creator as commanding men to observe the week of literal days in commemoration of vast, indefinite periods. This is unlike His method of dealing with His creatures. It makes indefinite and obscure that which He has made very plain. It is infidelity in its most insidious and hence most dangerous form; its real character is so disguised that it is held and taught by many who profess to believe the Bible.³⁰

SOME ENCOURAGING NOTES

In 1987 the Geoscience Research Institute invited seven college-level science teachers to meet for 1.5 days to discuss Institute activities and ways by which the Institute could better serve our colleges. The meeting was tense, but without acrimony. All participants agreed that the Institute should not entertain views at variance with the creation account of Genesis. It was felt that deviation from this would be a real loss to the Church. In general, our college teachers have a gratifying degree of sensitivity to the faith of their students.

There is broad approval for the work of the Institute. We find ourselves very much in demand by the church as a whole. Often we have to turn down requests for public appearances. We receive a constant stream of requests for literature and answers to questions. There is ample evidence of general respect for us throughout the church.

Recently, the Euro-Africa Division and the South American Division have requested Branch Offices of the GRI in their territories. The Education Summit held last summer after the 1990 General Con-

ference session has recommended that the work of GRI be amplified, and made specific recommendations to increase its sphere of influence. It also recommended that school boards ensure a clear faith-affirming role in creation issues.

A PROBLEM AREA

Probably the most serious problem that GRI faces is persistent opposition from some SDA scientists and theologians regarding the church's position on a recent six-day creation. This view of origins is the position of the Bible, of Ellen G. White, and of the statement of beliefs as voted by the General Conference in 1980. This same view has been reemphasized in the widely circulated *Seventh-day Adventists Believe...* published in 1988 (see No. 6). Opposition comes mainly from a respected group of scholars. The significant influence of these individuals is revealed in a number of official and unofficial SDA Church publications, and in meetings and geological field conferences which emphasize the problems with the concept of a recent creation.

One may wonder why this issue -- which is so challenging to traditional Adventism -- should emerge within the church. The definitive answer to such a question eludes human wisdom. A few suggestions may be instructive.

1. Science is a highly successful and admired enterprise. Furthermore, there is a stereotype -- sometimes encouraged by scientists themselves -- that scientists are the calm, calculating, unbiased appraisers of data. Since the vast majority of scientists believe in long ages for the development of life on Earth, it is concluded that the biblical account of beginnings must be erroneous.
2. The scholars of the world theological community largely deny the validity of the biblical account of beginnings. This lends further support to the traditional scientific view.
3. A widely circulated statement of belief regarding creation presented by church leadership received a strongly mixed reaction among SDA collegiate faculty in North America. Such statements are often perceived as challenging both academic authority and academic freedom.
4. The GRI has had personnel difficulties in the past, with several sincere scientists leaving the Institute over philosophical differences. These individuals find it difficult to support traditional church views.
5. The intense interest in the controversy between science and the Bible has encouraged creationists to come forth with quick, albeit sometimes erroneous, answers. These answers are often rightly criticized by knowledgeable people. The GRI must carry the burden of being associated with the errors of these creationists.
6. At present there is a tendency in intellectual circles to question almost anything. This is also the case in science.³¹ Skepticism, relativism and agnosticism are much respected, and any firm

positions are suspect. Unfortunately, this attitude tends to deny the existence of any truth including that regarding creation.

Interestingly, Adventism, with its emphasis on the Sabbath and creation, appeared around the same time that evolution was popularized. In the early part of this century, the Seventh-day Adventist Church successfully met the evolutionary argument of science. A 1963 survey³² witnesses to the strength of our position. This survey (Table 1) shows the percentage of opposition to evolution by church members of various denominations in Northern California.

Table 1

	Opposed to Evolution
Liberal Protestants (Congregationalists, Methodists, Episcopalians, Disciples)	11%
Moderate Protestants (Presbyterians, American Lutherans, American Baptists)	29%
Church of God	57%
Missouri-Synod Lutherans	64%
Southern Baptists	72%
Church of Christ	78%
Nazarenes	80%
Assemblies of God	91%
Seventh-day Adventists	94%

The question now facing us is: Can we successfully withstand the current challenge of the long geological ages which is undermining our confidence in Scripture and our main basis for Sabbath observance? Ellen White enjoins:

But God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms. The opinions of learned men, the deductions of science, the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, as numerous and discordant as are the churches which they represent, the voice of the majority – not one nor all of these should be regarded as evidence for or against any point of religious faith. Before accepting doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain 'Thus saith the Lord' in its support.³³

The Lord has stated that He created all in six days. Long geological ages negate that statement.

SHOULD THE SDA CHURCH CONSIDER ALTERNATIVES TO CREATION?

The SDA Church could adopt a variety of views regarding origins. As we have already seen above, serious suggestions along these lines have been advocated. Below are some reasons why, in my opinion, this should not be done.

1. **Pluralism about origins is difficult to justify theologically, since the Bible is non-pluralistic on this point. There is only one view of creation in the Bible. God accomplished His creation in six literal days.**

We should have tolerance and forgiveness for the individual who is in error, but a church should not defend the tolerance of error. Truth must be given priority. A church that takes a tolerant attitude towards error risks the loss of its authority and respect.

The apostle Peter (2 Pet 3:3-6) warns against the alternative views to creation that would be taught in the last days. The Bible not only supports creation; it also actively opposes other views.

2. **Alternative ideas to the creation model are contrary to the statement of fundamental beliefs of the SDA Church adopted at the 1980 General Conference. Unless that highest governance unit of the church were to change such concepts, they should be respected by the church as a whole.**

Statement 6³⁴ of the fundamental beliefs of the SDA Church reads in part:

God is Creator of all things, and has revealed in Scripture the authentic account of His creative activity. In six days the Lord made 'the heaven and the earth' and all living things upon the earth, and rested on the seventh day of that first week.

3. **Once we open the door to pluralism regarding origins, we will probably follow the same pattern of other churches by allegorizing Genesis 1-11.**

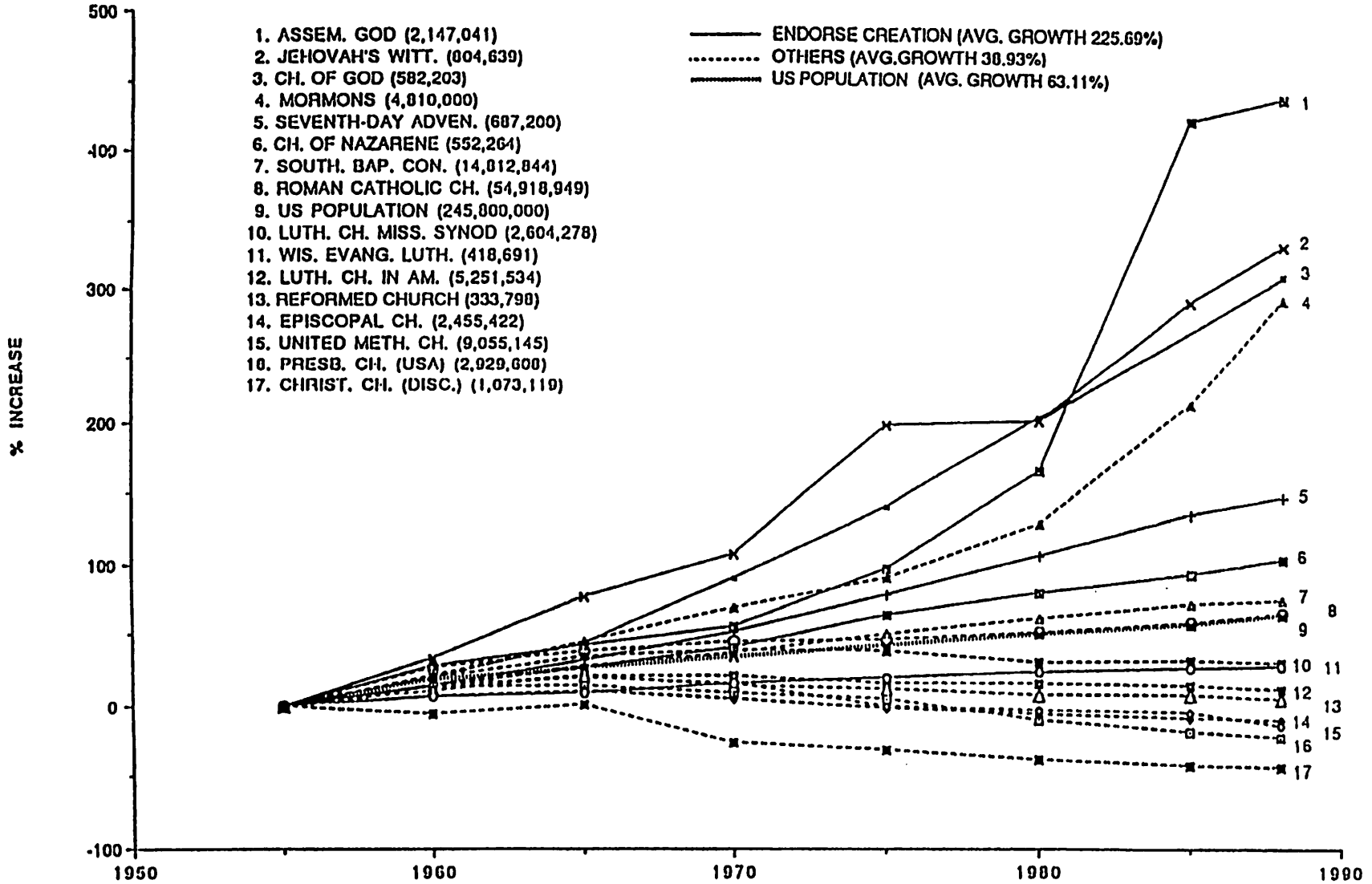
The history of other major Protestant churches suggests that after we lose confidence in the authenticity of the creation account, we will lose confidence in the validity of Genesis 1-11. This would subsequently raise questions regarding the validity of the Bible as a whole and the concepts of right and wrong contained therein. The Bible will become less significant.

4. **We should not accept less authenticated models of origins.**

Evolution has serious scientific problems. Models that are intermediate between evolution and creation lack both scientific and scriptural validation. Unless one can produce a more authoritative account of beginnings than that given in the Bible, alternative views should not be given credence. The SDA Church should not be asked to give up its belief in creation, unless a better substitute is provided.

US CHURCH MEMBERSHIP GROWTH IN % 1955-1988

Based on Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches 1990 Edition



5. Studies indicate that accommodation of beliefs by a church discourages church growth.

Some wonder if the church would not grow faster and become more intellectually respectable if we were to adopt a more pluralistic view of concepts of beginnings. The thinking is that we could accommodate more believers, especially scientists, if we adjusted our thinking more towards science. It has been argued that since the early Christian church changed its views on circumcision, the SDA Church should be willing to change its views on creation. On this basis, we could change almost everything. One should not confuse ceremonial procedures, such as circumcision, with more fundamental truths, such as creation.

It does not appear that church-membership growth would be facilitated by relaxing our endorsement of creation. Figure 2 (previous page) depicts the rate of growth of 16 major Christian denominations in the United States since 1955. Those who believe in creation have grown 226%; those who do not 39%. During that period, the U.S. population grew 63%.

Church growth is a very complex topic, and it is difficult to identify causes. The fact that one church which does not endorse creation (i.e., the Latter-day Saints) has been growing very rapidly and that one which does endorse creation (i.e., the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutherans) has not suggests that factors other than belief in creation are related to church growth. The studies of Dean R. Hoge³⁵ and especially Dean Kelley³⁶ suggest that firm beliefs are an especially important factor in church growth. The mainline churches that have adopted a more open policy towards beliefs have been losing members by the millions (Figure 2, Numbers 14-17). It would seem that adoption of a pluralistic stance about creation would encourage the same tendency.

The church has a responsibility to evangelize the world (Matthew 28:19-20). By adopting pluralistic patterns which, in the mainline churches, have given indication of being less successful, we may in effect be interfering with the Gospel commission.

6. We should not encourage the church to accept views that would reduce the faith of the believers.

The church should try to encourage faith in the Bible and discourage agnosticism and skepticism. In Matthew 18:1-11 Christ has given a most ominous warning against offending those who believe in Him: "For it must needs be that offences come; but woe be that man by whom the offence cometh!" (v 7). The faithfulness of the vast majority of our members to biblical truth should be honored.

The faith that the majority of our believers have in the Bible deserves special concern and nurturing. We should studiously avoid trends in the opposite direction. Preventive maintenance is far superior to waiting for a breakdown.

CONCLUSIONS

Sociological pressures and naturalistic philosophies have influenced major Christian denominations to accept concepts of progressive creation, theistic evolution, or deistic evolution covering millions of

years. These same factors are currently exerting some pressure within the SDA Church. Since none of the new ideas being proposed agree with the biblical account, their acceptance will decrease confidence in Scripture. Such views would also undermine our basic reasons for Sabbath observance as a memorial of God's creation.

Most important is the loss of confidence in the gospel of salvation that results when confidence in the Bible is deprecated. If we leave the impression that the leading biblical personalities did not give us correct information about beginnings, can we engender confidence in the salvation so generously extended to us through our Savior?

Christ's provocative question following the rendering of the parable of the importunate widow (Lk 18:8) seems pertinent: "Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?"

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