
How to Invalidate the Bible—Unconsciously: Some Thoughts on Pluralism About Origins

by Ariel A. Roth

Dr. Ariel A. Roth was born in Geneva, Switzerland, and grew up in Europe, the Caribbean, and North America. He holds a master's and a Ph.D. degree in Zoology from the University of Michigan with additional training in geology, mathematics, and radiation biology within the University of California. He has pursued research on coral reefs in both the Pacific and Caribbean areas. Dr. Roth has been a consultant in the recent evolution-creation controversy in the United States. He has conducted numerous paleontological and geological field trips in areas significant to the creation-evolution controversy. He has published widely, is the editor of the journal *Origins*, and is the director of the Geoscience Research Institute at Loma Linda University, California.

he story is told of a faithful gate inspector at a large nuclear processing plant. His duty was to check every worker leaving the plant to ensure that nothing—especially radioactive products—was taken. Armed with a Geiger counter, he thoroughly checked everyone who left.

One day a worker came up with a wheelbarrow full of sawdust. The inspector checked it thoroughly. Finding nothing radioactive, he allowed worker and sawdust to leave the plant. For several days the same action was repeated, with the same result.

Finally the inspector's curiosity led him to question the worker's purpose. Realizing that his ploy was being discovered,

the worker confessed that he was stealing wheelbarrows from the plant.

This story illustrates how easily concentration on specifics can let us forget a larger picture. So pluralism can provide a situation where a variety of ideas distracts our attention while the most vital issues are ignored.

As will be indicated later in this article, pluralism about origins has serious implications for a number of the fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We will, however, consider first a variety of ideas regarding origins and note some of the main problems posed by each.¹ After that review, we will consider the implications of these ideas for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. As earlier issues of *Adventist Perspectives* have implied, the assumption is made that both science and revelation are valid sources of information.

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 the earth's crust which is evidence of past life and, as such, is very pertinent to interpretations of the origin of life.

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 of the column (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 Archeocyathids 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 opposite ends of the various 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 a number of 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 only be adopted by yielding a significant degree of scriptural integrity to the concepts of evolutionary interpretation while still including God. These also require that one abandon 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

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places great emphasis on the Sabbath as a memorial of that creation week.

Comments on Interpretations

Table 1 (p. 17) is a chart representing ten different interpretations of the fossil record beginning with creation and ending with naturalistic evolution. These are arranged in a sequence that represents an increasing trend toward naturalism and away 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 ten interpretations could also be black-and-white issues, but with shades of gray—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” (Genesis 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 it is expected that 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 in place from the beginning (*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 molten rock (magmatic) 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 (Genesis 1, 2; Exodus 20:11, 31:17; Nehemiah 9:6; Psalm 146:6; Isaiah 40:26, 38; John 1:3; Acts 4:24; and Colossians 1:16). God did not create all. [While the Bible does suggest change (degeneration, Romans 8:22) which is attributed to sin, the Devil is not considered as a major crea-

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tor.] 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 (Genesis 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 is not that capricious. The testable parts are not.

3. The Gap Theory² (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 and 2. The *Scofield Reference Bible* refers to this in connection with Genesis 1:2³ which says that Earth was a waste place, and with Isaiah 45:18⁴ 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 Creation⁵ (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 in both with the evidence of gaps in the fossil record, which supports creation, and with 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 preying (predation) (for example, 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 classes of plants and animals (taxa) at various levels in the fossil record are not now living on Earth's surface. Dobzhansky,⁶ 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 Evolution⁷ (Marsh⁸ calls this "theological evolution." Modifications

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of this view, placing special emphasis on the creation and nature of man, have been proposed by Teilhard de Chardin⁹ and Bube.¹⁰ The latter author 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, for example—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 of the Bible who does not forget the sparrow (Luke 12:6) and whose ideal for life includes the lion and the lamb living peacefully together (Isaiah 11:6, 65:25). As in the case for progressive creation, we also have a logical difficulty with the appearance of evil in nature before the fall of man.

6. God at Beginning Only:¹¹

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. This particular model solves the problem of the origin of life on Earth, which is perhaps the most difficult problem confronting evolution.¹² Following this, naturalistic processes produce advanced forms of life.

Problems.—The problems outlined above for theistic evolution apply here to which one can also 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 neither 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.

7. Pantheistic Evolution:¹³

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 Ancestry:¹⁴

Description of Model.—Under this heading can be included a variety of ideas that have gained some popularity in recent years. 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—

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**TABLE 1
INTERPRETATIONS OF THE GEOLOGIC COLUMN**

1 CREATION	2 DEVIL THEN GOD	3 GAP THEORY	4 PROGRESSIVE CREATION	5 THEISTIC EVOLUTION
6 GOD AT BEGINNING ONLY	7 PANTHEISTIC EVOLUTION	8 SPACE ANCESTRY	9 DEISTIC EVOLUTION	10 NATURALISTIC EVOLUTION

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.

9. Deistic Evolution:

Description of Model.—In this ill-defined model, an impersonal mind directs evolution. There is some force or special factor above our present concept of naturalism that has functioned in developing the forms of life on Earth. God exists and was involved in early beginnings of the universe but is not active at present.

Problems.—Again, the problems with this model are the same as those above; also, because the function of a personal

God is eliminated, it is more difficult to conceive of the origin of those higher characteristics of man such as love, morality, concern, and freedom of choice which are difficult to explain on a naturalistic basis.

10. Naturalistic Evolution¹⁶ (also called evolution,¹⁷ atheistic evolution, or mechanistic evolution):¹⁸

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

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higher characteristics such as consciousness, free will, and love originate in a purely mechanistic system?

Contemporary United States 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 nine percent believe in naturalistic evolution (Model 10), thirty-eight percent believe that God was instrumental in the evolutionary process (Models 4 and 5), forty-four percent believe that man was created by God within the last ten thousand years (probably Model 1), and nine percent did not know. A 1986 survey in California, Connecticut, and Texas indicates that one-fourth 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 are being given serious consideration in some Adventist circles.

Relation of Various Interpretations About Origins to the Bible

None of the ten interpretations of origins discussed above, except the creation model, have good biblical support. Models 2 through 10 suggest progress, while the Bible speaks of degeneration (compare Romans 8:22 with Genesis 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 (Genesis 1 and 2) of six literal days, a few thousand years ago, that produced all the basic forms of life. It does not at all suggest long ages for this process. Also,

original Earth is described as empty and dark (Genesis 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. Such an approach undermines the Bible as a whole, because the leading Bible personalities, either directly or by implication, refer to Genesis 1 through 11 as factual. Their testimony supports the truthfulness of the biblical account of beginnings.

The apostle Peter believed Genesis 1 through 11 to be factual. In 2 Peter 3:3-6 he states that scoffers in the last days would be willingly ignorant of creation by God and destruction by the flood—a prophecy which has been remarkably fulfilled during the past two centuries. Evolution has replaced creation, and long geologic processes have replaced the flood. Peter also authenticates the account of Noah's being saved by the ark during the flood (1 Peter 3:20, 2 Peter 2:5).

The apostle Paul did not believe Genesis 1 through 11 to be allegorical. Several times he mentioned the creation of Adam and Eve, or Adam as the first man (Romans 5:12-14; 1 Corinthians 11:8, 15:22, 45; 1 Timothy 2:13, 14). He also authenticates the existence of Abel, Cain, Enoch, and Noah (Hebrews 11:4-7) and even refers to the serpent's beguiling of Eve as a literal event (2 Corinthians 11:3).

Christ refers to both the creation and the flood accounts in Genesis 1 through 11 as factual. In Matthew 19:4-6 and Mark 10:6, He cites the Scripture describing God's creation of male and female. In Matthew 24:37 and 38 and Luke 17:26 and 27, He refers to the evil of the days of Noah and specifically the day that Noah entered the ark. There is no question that Christ believed in both creation and the flood as described in Genesis.

God Himself authenticates both the creation and flood accounts of Genesis. In the book of Isaiah, He repeats His promise: "as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth" (Isaiah 54:9). Likewise in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:11, 31:17), He authenticates the Genesis account of beginnings. This runs counter to all the models for the development of life by an extended process over millions of years. In His own words, He created all in six days.

The suggestion that Genesis 1 through 11 is allegorical has far-reaching consequences. It doubts the testimony of the leading Bible personalities. One can propose a God who created over long ages yet who stated that He accomplished His creative acts in six days, but He would not be the God described in the Bible who declares things that are right (Isaiah 46:19) and never tells falsehoods (Titus 1:2). The Bible cannot be reconciled with concepts of the development of life over millions of years.

One of the most distinctive doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the seventh-day Sabbath. This doctrine is based upon belief in a literal six-day creation week. To deny the creation week effectively eliminates both the primary basis for Sabbath observance and the meaning of the "seventh-day" part of our church's name.

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:

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.¹⁹

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.²⁰

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.²¹

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."²²

The sequence of the ten interpretations given above illustrates how one can gradually follow a pattern away from God. Pluralism provides the easy steps to major changes.

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 and 2, Exodus 20:11, and 31:17. If there are millions of years in the fossil record, all of creation could not have occurred in six

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days, since many parts of the geologic column contain unique fossil kinds. This uniqueness combined with the nonuniqueness 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 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 of Earth). Biblical history does not allow much time either before or after the flood for the accumulation of very much sediment under normal conditions. This 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 Niebuhr²³ 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 churchly 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.'²⁴

Drifting away from the Bible and God is a common sociological pattern and 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 how difficult but important it is to resist such trends and move toward 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 (such as Auburn University, Boston University, Brown, Dart-

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mouth, 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 writer's knowledge) no institution has begun as secular and then become religious. Here the trend also seems to be away from God.

The patterns of drifting in modern churches, in biblical history, and in educational institutions all appear to be trends away from God. This is unfortunate. One can unconsciously and repeatedly drift from one position to a slightly different one. The ten models of interpretation of the fossil record given above, and a number of intermediates that could be placed between them, illustrate how one could slowly and almost imperceptibly drift away from a belief in a Creator to atheism. The path could be a facile way to invalidate the Bible and God—unconsciously.

Truth and Skepticism

In evaluating a variety of ideas, one must be meticulous and thorough. However, these commendable qualities should not in themselves be made the patent basis for skepticism which can interfere with the truth being sought. Truth should be given full freedom to exist.

This century has witnessed the development of a strong emphasis on academic freedom. Jealously guarded by the academic community, this principle demands an openness in the search for truth. Academic freedom tends to encourage pluralism as a variety of ideas. In it the pros and cons of each idea are given a free hearing. The issue of academic freedom versus religious authority is often raised when models of origins are being discussed.

In evaluating the various ideas regarding such a complex question as origins, one must remember that academic freedom can be both constructive and destructive. It can lead either closer to or farther from truth. It encourages an openness that permits evaluation of beliefs, while at the same time, like pluralism, it can also interfere with the adoption of truth. Pursued to its limit, academic freedom can insist that we be equally open to all viewpoints regardless of where they lead. Unfortunately, the only way to be equally open to all positions is to make no decision regarding which position is preferable. Therefore, with reference to arriving at truth, academic freedom poses an unsatisfying conundrum. One must recognize that the academic community and churches—including the Seventh-day Adventist Church—have the right to draw conclusions, decide what they believe to be true, and act upon those decisions.

This does not imply that the church never needs to reexamine its tenets. Individual and corporate reexamination are sometimes desirable, if for no other reason than to reassure that the examiners are on the right track. However, there is a danger that any process of reexamination may be dominated by skepticism. This will tend to paralyze any activity based upon the established truth.

While each individual and every social group needs to evaluate its beliefs, the primary purpose of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is not to debate the pros and cons of every issue ad infinitum, enjoyable as that might be. Adventism should not degenerate into a debating society that produces agnostics. The Church has the much higher purpose of fulfilling God's commission while serving the needs of a troubled world. This high commission, based upon the Bible and the messages of Ellen G. White, must not be degraded to the level of human opinion and become lost in a sea of pluralism.

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Pluralism—a Means To an End

Pluralism has a certain appeal. It caters to our desires to be erudite, tolerant, generous, and understanding. To a degree, it also satisfies some of our lingering doubts as to whether we have all of the truth. One of its more appealing features for a church is its ability to accommodate a broader spectrum of believers. This would logically seem to promote church growth. Apparently, however, this is not the case.

The often-quoted study of Kelley²⁵ suggests just the opposite. His usually respected (but sometimes disputed) data have been supported by other studies. Table 2 (p. 25) represents an extrapolation from his data. The data indicate that, on an average, conservative churches (which tend to restrict acceptable views) grow three times as fast as liberal churches (which tend to accept a multiplicity of ideas). Kelley concludes that religions with high demands grow, while those with leniency do not. He also suggests that the ecumenical movement decreases growth and that a church preserves its strength by using "the power of the gate."²⁶

Kelley's study has received some support from the study of Hoge,²⁷ who used twenty-one experts to evaluate eight church characteristics in seventeen denominations. He then compared these with rates of church growth.

Table 3 (p. 25) is modified from Hoge's Table 8.4 (see also Tables 8.1 and 8.2 in Hoge) so as to list the characteristics in the order of decreasing positive correlation coefficients. (A correlation coefficient of 1 would represent perfect correlation, while a correlation coefficient of 0 would represent no correlation.) Pluralism and tendencies associated with it do not correlate with church growth.

We must remember that correlation of factors does not directly demonstrate cause and effect. Too often the two

concepts are confused. However, correlation, especially when supported from different perspectives and in the absence of more compelling reasons, can suggest a relationship of cause and effect.

This study and more recent trends noted in the growth of various churches seem to indicate that the Seventh-day Adventist Church would not increase its rate of growth by adopting a plurality of views regarding origins. The creation concept is fundamental to our confidence in God and the Bible. This is emphasized by the journalist/writer and Christian apologist Malcolm Muggeridge²⁸ who proposes that the current fall of Christendom began "with the acceptance of the theory of evolution."

D. Elton Trueblood²⁹ affirms the general problem in loss of church membership and gives hope:

The fact that the mainline Christian churches have lost, and are continuing to lose, in membership is a very instructive fact. Anything of vitality can go down. But the other side of the story is that resilience is a fact. . . . I believe that Christ will not be defeated in the effort to produce His kingdom. But we have to pay a price for survival, and as I see it, the price is high.

Francis Schaeffer³⁰ likewise emphasizes the problem of broadening adjustments (pluralism?):

Accommodation, accommodation. How the mindset of accommodation grows and expands. The last sixty years have given birth to a moral disaster, and what have we done? Sadly we must say that the evangelical world has been part of the disaster. More than this, the evangelical response itself has been a disaster. Where is the clear voice speaking to the crucial issues of the day with distinctively biblical, Christian answers? With tears we must say it is not there and that a large segment of the evangelical world has become seduced by the world spirit of this present age. And more than this, we can expect the future to be a further disaster, if the evangelical world

"Kelley concludes that religions with high demands grow, while those with leniency do not. He also suggests that the ecumenical movement decreases growth and that a church preserves its strength by using 'the power of the gate.'"

TABLE 2
COMPARISON OF GROWTH IN LIBERAL AND CONSERVATIVE BRANCHES
OF CHURCHES IN THE UNITED STATES

[From graphs in D. M. Kelley, *Why Conservative Churches are Growing* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1977).]

Growth in United States Population from 1940 to 1970: 54%

Percentage of Branch Growth from 1940 to 1970

Church	Liberal	Conservative
Presbyterian	42	80
Methodist	42*	93*
Lutheran	57	118
Reformed	39	134
Baptist	- 4	133
Mormon	76*	215*
Average	42	129

*Figures extrapolated from data of 1940-1968 to 1940-1970

For comparative purposes—growth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in United States from 1940 to 1970: 226%

TABLE 3
CORRELATION OF CHURCH CHARACTERISTICS WITH CHURCH GROWTH
 (modified from Hoge's Table 8.4)

Characteristics of Church	Correlation Coefficient of Characteristic with Church Growth Rate for 1965-1975
Emphasis on distinctive lifestyle and morality	.97
Emphasis on local and community evangelism	.93
Not involved in social, political, or economic action	.88
Does not favor ecumenism	.87
Theological conservatism, literal accuracy of Scripture, suspicion of science or rationality	.86
Strict standards of belief in contrast to pluralism in belief	.84
Weak ethnic identity	.25
Congregational (vs. centralized) polity	.22

does not take a stand for biblical truth and morality in the full spectrum of life.

The indecisiveness generated by a plurality of views appears to deprecate both faith in a church's message and confidence in its program.

Reasons Why the Seventh-day Adventist Church Should Not Adopt a Pluralistic Approach to the Question of Origins

The Seventh-day Adventist Church could adopt a variety of views regarding origins. Serious suggestions along these lines have been advocated. Below are several reasons why this should not be done. A number of others could be added.

1. Pluralism about origins is difficult to justify theologically, since the Bible is nonpluralistic 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 Peter 3:3-6) directly and prophetically warns against the alternative views to creation that would be taught in the last days. Also, it does not seem that God would mislead and allow His prophets to be misinformed for over three thousand years, only to let James Hutton and Charles Darwin develop the correct view of origins.

2. Alternative ideas to the creation model are contrary to the updated statement of fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church adopted in 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 6³¹ of the fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist 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 the door is opened to pluralism regarding origins, we will probably follow the pattern of other churches by allegorizing Genesis 1 through 11:

The history of other major Protestant churches suggests that were we once to lose confidence in the authenticity of the creation account, we would soon lose confidence in the validity of Genesis 1 through 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 would become far 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 could produce a more authoritative account of beginnings than that given in the Bible, alternative views should not be given credence. The Seventh-day Adventist Church should not be asked to give up its belief in creation unless a better substitute is provided.

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

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.

“Were we once to lose confidence in the authenticity of the creation account, we would soon lose confidence in the validity of Genesis 1 through 11. This would subsequently raise questions regarding the validity of the Bible as a whole.”

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 instead of in agnosticism or 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 to that man by whom the offence cometh!" (verse 7). The faithfulness of the vast majority of our members to biblical truth should be honored.

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 Seventh-day Adventist Church. Since none of the new ideas being proposed agrees with the biblical account, their acceptance would decrease confidence in Scripture. Such views would also undermine our basic reasons for Sabbath observance as a memorial of God's creation.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church cannot seriously entertain alternative views to the creation account and still hope to maintain its strength and mission which are based upon the Bible. She must take a clear and firm stand for the biblical account of creation.

NOTES

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