

# The Crucial Question

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Donald E. Hall's third article in the Thoughts-on-the-Scientific-Attitude series (The 23-Hour Day, SPECTRUM 3(4):39-51, Autumn 1971) was called "excellent" on the editor's page. Being curious, I naturally read it first. Hall presented some interesting facts, ideas, and thought-provoking conclusions. Just how conclusive they are, even to Hall, may be unfair to say. I was glad for knowledge of the facts presented but was unable to follow all the conclusions.

One conclusion concerned the age of the earth as revealed by the ring count of some corals, bivalves, cephalopods, and other marine life. The presentation of the facts does not give me a feeling of insecurity. Such facts, although they are outside my disciplines, are not outside my experience with God, whose word and messages I trust. I believe that God says things so simply that a child can understand his promises and statements without difficulty. Therefore, the basic issue raised by Hall's article, I believe, is one of authority. Whom shall we trust?

I do not intend to be polemical, yet I would like to present several quotations that bear on this article and give a balance to the subject, acting as a reminder to some persons and a means of clarity to others.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters [Genesis 1:1-2].

So God created . . . every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds. . . . And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day [Genesis 1:21-22].

In six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it [Exodus 20:11].

To the foregoing quotations from the Bible, which include reference to all life in the seas, I would add from Ellen G. White the following statements — which

different people may evaluate and interpret differently for whatever the verses may mean to them.

I was then carried back to the creation and was shown that the first week, in which God performed the work of creation in six days and rested on the seventh day, was just like every other week. The great God, in His days of creation and day of rest, measured off the first cycle as a sample for successive weeks till the close of time.<sup>1</sup>

When the Lord declares that He made the world in six days and rested on the seventh day, He means the day of twenty-four hours, which He has marked off by the rising and setting of the sun.<sup>2</sup>

But the infidel supposition that the events of the first week required seven vast, indefinite periods for their accomplishment strikes directly at the foundation of the Sabbath of the fourth commandment. It makes indefinite and obscure that which God has made very plain. It is the worst kind of infidelity; for with many who profess to believe the record of creation, it is infidelity in disguise. It charges God with commanding men to observe the week of seven literal days in commemoration of seven indefinite periods, which is unlike His dealings with mortals, and is an impeachment of his wisdom.

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Infidel geologists claim that the world is very much older than the Bible record makes it. They reject the Bible record because of those things which are to them evidences from the earth itself that the world has existed tens of thousands of years. And many who profess to believe the Bible record are at a loss to account for wonderful things which are found in the earth, with the view that creation week was only seven literal days, and that the world is now only about six thousand years old.<sup>3</sup>

All true science is in harmony with His works; all true education leads to obedience to His government. Science opens new wonders to our view; she soars high, and explores new depths; but she brings nothing from her research that conflicts with divine revelation.<sup>4</sup>

Geologists claim to find evidence from the earth itself that it is very much older than the Mosaic record teaches. . . . But apart from Bible history, geology can prove nothing.<sup>5</sup>

There should be a settled belief in the divine authority of God's Holy Word. The Bible is not to be tested by men's ideas of science. Human knowledge is an unreliable guide. Skeptics who read the Bible for the sake of caviling, may, through an imperfect comprehension of either science or revelation, claim to find contradictions between them; but rightly understood, they are in perfect harmony. . . . All truth, whether in nature or in revelation, is consistent with itself in all its manifestations.<sup>6</sup>

To these quotations let me add that Jesus referred both to the creation of Adam and Eve and to Noah's day. He believed in those events. If we disbelieve them, then we conclude that Jesus is untrue and uninspired — which puts us outside the pale of Christianity.

Hall's use of number-squares as an illustration of counterexample is excellent. Likewise, I enjoyed his five options of response to the facts he presented.

Frankly, I am a young-earth creationist. Yet, although God states in his word that Creation occurred by divine fiat, the actual method is not described. Therefore, as Hall says in his appendix D, "as to how the Creator worked, I [too] am much less certain." Nevertheless, "for a variety of reasons," mostly theological and experiential, I believe that the earth's age, as men currently know the planet, is approximately "6,000 ± 100 years." It may be naive of me to rest my faith on

this belief, for I, like Hall, hope that if God ever explains Creation to me “I would not be offended, or express any bitterness that he had allowed me to misunderstand or that he had not done it all in the way I thought he should” (p. 50).

One may possibly see in Genesis 1:2, or in other passages, basis for believing that some kind of foundation material existed before the actual Creation week. Without making God a debtor to “pre-existing material,” such an earlier creation, with the earth left formless and void, might not contradict the Mosaic account in Genesis. But by the wording of the fourth commandment, such material would have to be inorganic, not organic. To be an “old-earth creationist” may be one thing; but to believe in a long earth-history apart from the creation of the human race on the sixth day is another. This persuasion is tantamount to implying a lapse of time between the fifth and sixth days of the Creation week or between parts of the sixth day itself. This stance is biblically unjustified.

The pros and cons of the discovery of growth rings in certain marine creatures is discussed by Hall under five options. I was glad to learn these facts. Their implication, however, instead of shaking my faith in God’s word, only drives me to a need for a better understanding of it. Like Jonah, perhaps I may make Creation and the Bible story more meaningful with a revision of my model without the acceptance of a shorter day.

I fail to see that a change of models for the Noachian Flood is indicated by a slowing of the earth’s rotation. The biblical view of the Deluge would give only two values, and since (as I understand the story and nature’s data) destruction did occur suddenly, fossil deposits would reveal the pre-Flood value. The fact that fossils show instead a continuous variation makes me feel that the model change needs to be of Creation rather than of the Flood. But instead of the requirement of more time, as Hall seems to suggest, how about a change of method — or, that is, an understanding of the method God used?

The alteration in understanding of the way God made our biosphere is not original with me, but the setting in which I learned it makes me think that it is not too widely known. So I put it forth as a possible model of Creation that appears to accord with the Bible record.

Adam and Eve were created as adults, as were the animals, birds, trees, and other forms of life. Therefore, it is also possible that shellfish, corals, and those forms of sea and water life that appear to reveal long and continuous development reaching into tens of thousands and millions of years were created as mature forms and that their seeming age cannot be tied to the rotation of the earth.

If God did create life on the earth in an adult or mature form, perhaps this would affect the accuracy of radioactive and other dating methods. Inorganic materials may well have been made so that such dating methods fail to give a true

picture. Likewise, the dating of organic matter by carbon 14 or amino acids may yield inaccurate data. (I admit that such information is outside my disciplines and that I cannot explain all the technical factors.)

The model of Creation that I have set forth may be inadequate to explain the facts. Nevertheless, it is time that Seventh-day Adventists stop trying to prove the unprovable. I do not mean to stop research, but instead to quit attempting to treat as a fact that can be proved that which is only a theory to many scientists and which must be accepted by faith. Not all theories of earth origins, theological or scientific, are subject to objective proof. Creation, like redemption, is based on faith. Corroboration of a model is fine, but it does not *prove* conclusively the truth of the model or of the theory.

93 It is true that a creationist and revelation-based stand on origins will close many educated minds to evangelism. Dogmatism regarding time factors, in the face of observed fact, will only intensify this response. It is here that Seventh-day Adventist ministers need to *know the facts*. If Adventist scientists will provide models that conform to revelation's demands (instead of trying to make revelation conform to observation's opinions), then ministers, when confronted by scientists who do not believe as they do, will at least be aware of the facts; and their logical, coherent explanation of their model will appeal to some. The presentation by Adventist scientists of carefully-thought-out models and the scientific facts available is both a duty and an opportunity. If consensus is not possible, let more than one model be provided, together with the pros and cons of each.

Thus the matter of suspended judgment arises. If one has the facts, but does not think any of the models adequate, and desires to suspend judgment on the interpretation of those facts, he should do so and be free to wait until he finds what he considers to be a more fitting model. But if suspended judgment means waiting for more facts so as to choose more intelligently between God's authority and man's interpretation of those facts — either the church's authority or science's word regarding the meaning of observed phenomena — then suspended judgment is dangerous. Herein lies the critical problem.

The Author and Source of all true revelation and of nature is the same — God. He will not contradict himself. He cannot. The full processes he uses to create nature are not revealed in revelation, but they do harmonize. I have found God and his messages to be dependable. I have proved God again and again, and I trust him. I believe the young-earth creation theory, not because it is what someone taught me, nor because it is what some say the church teaches, nor because I have found what is for me a satisfactory model that conforms with the known facts as I understand them — but because I *know* the Maker and believe him. For me, his word is reliable.

## REFERENCES

- 1/ Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, 4 vols. (Washington, D. C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association 1945), vol. 3, p. 90.  
White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association 1958), p. 111.  
White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, 4 vols. (Battle Creek, Michigan: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association 1870), vol. 1, p. 85.  
2/ White, *Testimonies to Ministers* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association 1962), p. 136.  
3/ White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, pp. 86-87. See also *Spiritual Gifts*, pp. 94-95.  
4/ White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 115.  
5/ White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 112. See also *Spirit of Prophecy*, p. 88; *Spiritual Gifts*, p. 93.  
6/ White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 114.

# Evidence or Conjecture?

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With mounting concern I have read Donald E. Hall's two 1971 articles (SPECTRUM, Summer and Autumn). "The 23-Hour Day" causes me to wonder whether he is trying to prove too much. Since I have not checked his sources, my comments are based on his report of them.

My first observation is that the phenomenon of one-per-day growth "rings" in marine life is perhaps only a coincidence, albeit a somewhat convincing one. I believe that this is an obscurantist position. Unless someone has observed a mollusk making a ring each day for an extended period, I think caution would be advisable.

Without a certainty that these creatures produce one ring per day as a general rule, are we justified in making conclusions such as Hall's? If "modern" marine animals (I presume he means present-day species) produce 360-370 rings per grand division (assumed to be a year), this means that some of them are making more than one ring per day. If some produce 360 per year, they are failing to make at least one per day; the ones who make 370 per year may have made less