The Reptile King

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By: Sean Pitman, Dr. Warren Ashworth, and Pastor Ron Cook July 12, 2001 On the front cover of the spring 2011 edition of La Sierra University Magazine there is a wonderful photograph of Dr. Lee Grismer smiling at a gecko in his hand and titled, “The Reptile King”. The article goes on to detail Dr....

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On the front cover of the spring 2011 edition of La Sierra University Magazine there is a wonderful photograph of Dr. Lee Grismer smiling at a gecko in his hand and titled, “The Reptile King”. The article goes on to detail Dr. Grismer’s intense passion for nature and for God and recounts several of Grismer’s thrilling experiences discovering new species in exotic locations around the world.

The only problem, of course, is that the article says nothing about Dr. Grismer’s ardent opposition to the Adventist position on origins and his active support and promotion of mainstream evolutionary theories in his classes. While the article does describe Grismer’s love for God and his experience of God through nature (and even his baptism into the Adventist Church), all wonderful things indeed, what about the fact that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has asked all educators in all Adventist schools to “uphold and advocate the church’s position on origins” and for our students “to receive a thorough, balanced, and scientifically rigorous exposure to and affirmation of our historic belief in a literal, recent six-day creation, even as they are educated to understand and assess competing philosophies of origins that dominate scientific discussion in the contemporary world”? (reference)

Dr. Grismer believes and teaches that living things on this planet have existed and evolved over billions of years through a process that involved the death and untold suffering of sentient creatures through countless generations. He teaches that modern birds evolved from dinosaurs and that whales evolved from land-dwelling mammals, etc… all in line with mainstream evolutionary thinking (see slide from one of Dr. Grismer’s LSU class lectures below). There is no mention in any of Dr. Grismer’s lectures of any counter evidence to mainstream evolutionary thinking, the age of life on Earth, or any empirical support for the Adventist position on a recent creation by God of much of the diversity and adaptability of living things within six literal days.
Given Dr. Grismer’s significant charisma and evident popularity with his students, his evolutionary beliefs and teachings carry a great deal of weight with nearly all of his students. Most come away from his classes shaken in their understanding and belief in the Adventist position on a literal creation week of all life on this planet within fairly recent history. Many leave Adventism behind, or, if they do stay in the church, do so as social Adventists who really do not believe in several of the basic doctrinal positions of the church. They somehow meld a form of theistic evolutionism with Christianity in line with Dr. Grismer’s own beliefs and influence.

I am well aware of the influence of Dr. Grismer’s teachings, and those of several other science professors at LSU who hold and teach similar views, as I’ve spoken with many students who have taken courses from these professors. Even members of my own family have been dramatically affected by such teachings and have either left the church or no longer subscribe to various official doctrinal positions of the church.

It seems, therefore, rather brazen of LSU to actively promote a professor who is so actively undermining the bedrock fundamental positions of the Adventist Church within our own school system. Does the leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church take no notice of such subversive activity? Or is our leadership simply too powerless or intimidated by the intelligentsia within the church to do anything or even to say anything of any real substance to address this serious issue within many of our schools and universities?

While LSU has been among the most bold in its open defiance of the clearly stated goals and ideals of the Adventist Church, as an organization, this is by no means a unique situation to LSU. If the unique contribution of the Adventist Church to the reality of the Gospel message of hope is to remain viable, something must be done to address the magnetic influence of those who are most ardently opposed to our doctrines and who are undermining the order and government of the church from within.

At the very least the Adventist Church should be active in warning parents, students, and the church membership at large of these problems within our schools and of the risks involved with sending our young people to be placed under the influence of those like Dr. Grismer. At the very least the members of our
church deserve greater transparency as to what can be expected from so-called “Adventist Education” which is often purchased at great price and personal sacrifice by those who are entrusting their greatest possessions on this Earth into the hands of an institution that bears the name, “Seventh-day Adventist”.