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By Sean Pitman (7/19/11) In a recent comment posted to this website, Dr. Lawrence Geraty, retired president of La Sierra University, has affirmed his own belief in the Adventist position on creation (Link). For the record, 1) I am NOT a theistic evolutionist nor have I ever suggested it to be...

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In a recent comment posted to this website, Dr. Lawrence Geraty, retired president of La Sierra University, has affirmed his own belief in the Adventist position on creation (Link).

For the record, 1) I am NOT a theistic evolutionist nor have I ever suggested it to be “the true model of origins.” 2) I have NEVER suggested anything like the view that conservative Adventists (of whom I count myself) are “the type that fly planes into buildings.” (Hopefully that denial will make less “scary” the fact that I have been the president of an Adventist institution.)

Why would Dr. Geraty feel the need to clarify his position on origins with the use of such strong and dramatic language? Could it be that his position has been less than clear given many of his past statements and actions as president of LSU? Consider, for example, Dr. Geraty’s comments published in Spectrum in 2010:

Christ tells us they will know us by our love, not by our commitment to a seven literal historical, consecutive, contiguous 24-hour day week of creation 6,000 years ago which is NOT in Genesis no matter how much the fundamentalist wing of the church would like to see it there.

Fundamental Belief No. 6 uses Biblical language to which we can all agree; once you start interpreting it according to anyone’s preference you begin to cut out members who have a different interpretation. I wholeheartedly affirm Scripture, but NOT the extra-Biblical interpretation of the Michigan Conference. Since when is salvation by correct knowledge anyway?

Consider also that Dr. Geraty, during his term as president of LSU, hired science professors (Larry McCloskey and Lee Grismer in particular) who were known supporters of mainstream evolutionary theories and who had a history of undermining the Adventist position on a literal six-day creation week. While Dr. Geraty is correct in saying that he was not directly responsible, it was Dr. Grismer, the “Reptile King”, who told students that those who believe in the literal creation week are, “The ones who fly airplanes into buildings” (Link). Students also warned Dr. Geraty of Dr. McCloskey’s attack on the Adventist view of origins yet Dr. Geraty did nothing to help these students or to counter the influence of those who were actively promoting mainstream evolution at LSU during his term as president (Link). Instead, he told
everyone who would listen that all of the professors at LSU are “creationists” in full support of the fundamentals of Adventism.

Dr. Geraty had to know that such claims were very deceptive if not outright lies. He could only have seen himself clear to make such claims based on the current wording of FB#6 that Dr. Geraty and Dr. Fritz Guy helped to draft. Drs. Geraty and Guy interpret the current wording of FB#6 as allowing for non-literal views of the creation week.

Also during Dr. Geraty’s term, theologians like Dr. Webster and Dr. Guy (also a former president of LSU from 90′-93′) gave lectures to LSU students telling them, “Nobody takes the Genesis account of creation literally.” ( Link ).

It is somewhat difficult, therefore, to take Dr. Geraty’s claims of support for the Adventist perspective on origins seriously given his support for those who are most active in attacking the fundamentals of the church – especially when Dr. Geraty himself refers to those who do hold to the importance a literal creation week as view as “radical right-wing tea-party fundamentalists” ( Link ) one could hardly be blamed for misunderstanding Dr. Geraty’s true position.

The confusion only increases when one considers things like Dr. Geraty’s statements in apparent support of Prof. Ervin Taylor who argues for the reliability of mainstream radiocarbon dating interpretations (which Dr. Taylor presents as clearly falsifying the SDA notion of a literal creation week in recent history; Link ) Dr. Geraty has also personally challenges the world-wide nature of the Noachian Flood, arguing that the author(s) of Genesis are most likely talking about a local flood. In the book, “Understanding Genesis: Contemporary Adventist Perspectives” Dr. Geraty personally wrote:

“Was the Genesis flood worldwide? There is no evidence for that as of now, but it certainly covered the world known to the author… It is the opinion of most experts, and little reasonable doubt remains (although some would dispute this) that the events of Genesis 6-8 must have taken place within a limited though indeed a vast area, covering not the entire globe, but the scene of the human story of the previous chapters.”

Dr. Geraty stands here in direct and very open opposition to the historical position of the SDA Church on this issue. He also, at the same time, challenges the SDA understanding of the inspiration of Mrs. White who clearly claims that she was shown by God that the Noachian Flood was indeed world-wide in nature and was responsible for the formation of much of the geologic an fossil records…

It is also rather difficult to ignore the impression that Dr. Geraty strongly favors the “progressive” movement within the Church given his public support for the actions of those like Elder Hammill. When former General Conference Vice-President Richard Hammill became a “progressive creationist”, turning his back on the fundamental SDA doctrine of a literal 6-day creation week, Dr. Geraty seemed to be very pleased indeed as he introduced Hammill with the following words of praise: “I could hardly have imagined inviting our speaker to share his testimony on his journey as a progressive believer. But to his credit, he is one of the few converts to Adventism that I know who, after his retirement, has truly made a transition to a progressive faith.” ( Link )

Given such public statements and actions in favor of those attacking the church from within, together with his own published comments on the topic of origins, it is very difficult for me to accept the sincerity of Dr. Geraty’s support for the Adventist position – to include the literal nature of the creation week and the Genesis narrative as a whole. While Dr. Geraty has been rather emphatic in his denial of “theisitic evolutionism” I’ve yet to see him clearly state his support for the historical reality of the literal creation week, the
worldwide Noachian Flood, or the relatively recent creation of all forms of life on this planet (i.e., within the last 10,000 years). As always, Dr. Geraty is less than transparent in the language that he uses. He redefines terms for himself and uses words in ways he knows many people will misunderstand what he’s really saying. He continues to describe the professors at LSU as “creationists”, in full support of Adventism, knowing full well what this term means for most people, while also knowing that many of LSU’s professors do not support the Adventist concept of a literal creation week much less a recent arrival of all life on this planet or a worldwide Noachian Flood.

In short, I would ask that Dr. Geraty at least be forthright about what is being taught at LSU and his own personal responsibility for the current situation in play – the current creation/evolution controversy within and beyond the walls of LSU.