Hope? Slim to none

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At La Sierra, Biology Faculty Affirms Importance of Teaching About Creation in Curriculum

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According to the *Adventist Review* a “joint statement, prepared and signed by six LSU biology professors and a group of trustees, offers hope of a peaceful resolution to tensions…. ” Really?

Whatever hope there may be is slim to none, and LSU biology professors don’t appear to have changed their tune. The joint statement proposes they teach “Creation as a faith conviction, rather than as science.” This is what they’ve believed all along.

The joint statement goes on to say “Creation is not a scientific construct. It is a faith construct. The conviction of Divine Creation lies beyond the purview of the methods of empirical science, and cannot be subjected to them.” This is nothing new. This is one of many mental gymnastic acts performed by Seventh-day Adventists attempting to embrace contradictory world-views—evolution and creation. The evidence for creation is completely ignored, which only highlights the obvious evolutionary bias in which this statement was created. What exactly about Divine Creation do they believe is beyond the purview of the methods of empirical science? They merely offer the status quo as something new and viable.

Despite faith and science having little to do with each other, they suggest the two “can and should constructively interact.” Their approach is based on two core principles. The first principle immediately pits a Biblical concept of creation with the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of creation. The “Biblical concept of creation” and “the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of Genesis 1 and 2” will be incorporated in the classroom? What does that mean? Are they not Seventh-day Adventists themselves, and don’t Seventh-day Adventists believe their understanding of Genesis is Biblical?

There is nothing mentioned in the joint statement about what affirmation of the Adventist position means in the classroom. Will it be presented as the position or a position among others and of no particular consequence except that it is what Adventists believe? The answer is simple.
The LSU biology department doesn’t believe in the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of Genesis 1-2. All they can offer is an affirmation, whatever that means, and a mention of what Adventists believe when origin discussions arise. This approach is something you could get at a secular university.

The second principle says they want to continue to teach and research in the “various disciplines of the modern sciences according to the most up-to-date and rigorous standards of the published science.” What does modern, mainstream science teach? Overwhelmingly evolutionary theory. Now the core contention is not that the theory of evolution is taught, but how it is taught in relationship to creationism. The principle concludes with their desire to include “the data which highlight the strengths and weaknesses of various models.” While this statement sounds hopeful, there are number of problems with it. First, they already said creation is not a scientific construct, thus there wouldn’t be any scientific evidence for creation, which means none would be offered. Second, they believe the data supports evolutionary theory.

There is nothing in this joint statement that suggests any changes to the status quo of the biology department. Clearly the dialogue from LSU isn’t any different than before. They have not changed and it appears they have no intention of changing.
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The Adventist Review
By Mark A. Kellner

A statement by a group of biology professors and trustees at La Sierra University, a Seventh-day Adventist Church-owned school in Riverside, California to affirm and incorporate the church’s position on creation at the classroom instructional level alongside traditional scientific approaches has been welcomed by officers and educational administrators of the North American Division, the regional entity of the church which provides oversight and accreditation to church-operated institutions.

The joint statement, prepared and signed by six LSU biology professors and a group of trustees, offers hope of a peaceful resolution to tensions that have surrounded church and public media accounts of the curricular differences between the university’s teaching on origins and the doctrinal positions of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

“We’re pleased to see the dialogue move to a new and constructive level,” says Larry Blackmer, vice-president for education for the North American Division. “When you’re trying to build a bridge, you pay special honor to those who help engineer the foundations and the architecture that will support future traffic, and we consider this development one that has considerable positive potential.”

In their statement, the faculty members and trustees said “two core principles” were behind their proposal:
First, “affirmation and incorporation of the Biblical concept of creation, including the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of Genesis 1 and 2, as a faith position at the classroom level, when questions of origins are discussed.”

Second, a “continued teaching and research in the various disciplines of the modern sciences according to the most up-to-date and rigorous standards of the published science, to which we contribute as practicing scientists and active faculty, including the data which highlight the strengths and weaknesses of various models.” (Read more)

Read the full texts of the both the LSU biology faculty/trustee statement and the response by the North American Division leadership.
At La Sierra, Biology Faculty Affirms Importance of Teaching About Creation in Curriculum

Statement welcomed by North American Division Leadership

BY MARK A. KELLNER, Adventist Review news editor

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First, "affirmation and incorporation of the Biblical concept of creation, including the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of Genesis 1 and 2, as a faith position at the classroom level, when questions of origins are discussed."

Second, a "continued teaching and research in the various disciplines of the modern sciences according to the most up-to-date and rigorous standards of the published science, to which we contribute as practicing scientists and active faculty, including the data which highlight the strengths and weaknesses of various models."

The group further recommended that an Education Summit be conducted to which "scientists, biblical scholars, and theologians, who are actively publishing in the peer-reviewed literature on the earth sciences, the biological sciences, biblical studies, and the theology of creation" be invited—"in order to freely discuss together the difficult issues." The proposed Education Summit and other opportunities for dialogue are to encourage the "promotion of an ongoing culture at La Sierra University of open and transparent dialogue on these important issues among Faculty, Trustees, and Administration on campus."

North American Division leadership responded quickly and positively to the proposal from the LSU faculty and trustees, issuing a statement saying it was in "general agreement" with the core principles contained in the document, adding, "it has always been the position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America that we want all of our institutions of higher learning to uphold the highest levels of academics including rigorous science . . . . At the same time we support your affirmation of the Seventh-day Adventist position on creation, which is a literal six-day, short-term creation. While we understand the tensions that exist between these positions, the most important values that we hold together
are the students’ faith and its expression as they leave our institutions.”

The NAD statement said this “proposal is a major step forward in that conversation and with prayer and continued diligence, is the basis for more direct resolution of the ongoing controversy surrounding LSU.”

Ricardo Graham, La Sierra board of trustees chairman, said, “It is critical to note the scientists at LSU have always been willing to dialogue relative to the resolution of the teaching of evolution and creation in the biological sciences. When people of good will and good faith openly approach a challenging situation such as this, God positions them for a hopeful resolution. While many members around the world had been praying, God has been hearing. And while this is not a conclusive position, we praise God for the direction in which He is leading.”

Dan Jackson, North American Division president, also supported the move: ‘In moments of challenge and crisis, the Spirit of God inevitably moves on the minds of individuals to frame creative and peaceable solutions,” he said. “This is a helpful and much-needed start of a conversation at the level where it can do the most good in affecting what actually impacts the lives and faith commitments of hundreds of Adventist university students—and we consider that to be a good thing.”

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