Back to Square One…

By Sean Pitman

The recently published Adventist Review article on the proposal of six LSU science professors regarding the teaching of origins is very disturbing to me, especially where the leaders of our church seem to happily accept the proposal of the LSU professors to continue to do what...

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The recently published *Adventist Review* article on the proposal of six LSU science professors regarding the teaching of origins is very disturbing to me, especially where the leaders of our church seem to happily accept the proposal of the LSU professors to continue to do what they’ve been doing all along – teaching mainstream evolutionism as the only valid “science” or empirically-based position on origins while biblical creationism is defined for their students as a “faith-only” position without any meaningful or rational backing by science or empirical evidence of any kind.

The LSU science professors who signed the document, especially Professors Grismer and Greer, are the very same ones who have been the most ardent in promoting mainstream evolutionary theories as the true story of origins while telling their students that the Biblical account is hopelessly out of touch with reality – at least without the input of enormous amounts of incredibly blind faith. Greer and Grismer, in particular, certainly don’t believe in a literal six day creation week during which all life was created on this planet just a few thousand years ago nor do they believe in a worldwide Noachian-style Flood. They’ve taught their students and have made many public statements that the only empirically-rational interpretation of the currently available evidence overwhelmingly favors the mainstream evolutionary model of origins. They’ve explained, over and over again, that the Biblical model simply isn’t rationally tenable from their own perspectives and that they personally do not and cannot support such a model in their own classrooms. Clearly then, such professors would be more than happy to sign a document that claims that the Biblical perspective on origins has absolutely no meaningful
support from science or empirical evidence and is, rather, completely within the realm of empirically-blind faith and historical Adventist tradition.

Why then are Elders Dan Jackson, Ricardo Graham, and Larry Blackmer, high-ranking leaders within our Seventh-day Adventist Church, so excited about this proposal for LSU science professors to keep doing what they’ve always been doing? – promoting evolutionism as the only empirically-rational scientific conclusion on origins while Biblical creationism is presented as being completely out of touch with empirical reality? a faith-only relic of Adventism and outdated Christianity in general? Do they not realize that faith is meaningless without at least some support from empirical evidence? that even scientific conclusions, theories, and notions of reality are based on leaps of faith to one degree or another? that modern evolutionary ‘science’ is no less faith-based than is Biblical creationism? that the greater the available evidence the greater the faith? Did the faith of Jesus’ disciples increased or decrease after empirical evidence was given to them of the Resurrection?

Therefore, for our church leaders to go along with the notion that the Biblical account of origins has no basis in rational empirical evidence that goes beyond empirically-blind faith is a huge step backward in the church’s understanding of faith and its relationship to evidence. Is this the message that we really want to give to our young people? that there is no rational or otherwise substantive empirically-based reason to believe the Genesis account of origins? that the Genesis account of origins must be taken on blind faith alone in the face of otherwise overwhelming empirical evidence to the contrary? Or, is this more about politics within the church than it is about upholding the supposedly “fundamental” positions of the church as something incredibly valuable to present to the world as a basis of a solid hope in the Gospel message?

Back to square one we go…

Sean Pitman
http://www.DetectingDesign.com

14 Responses to “Back to Square One…”

1. Holly Pham October 10, 2011 at 11:10 am

You’re so correct Sean. We are truly back to the start, with no real change, action, or future actions planned except more “dialogue.” What will they be dialoguing about, and when will it stop?

(Quote)

Hot debate. What do you think? 🇺🇸 🇺🇸 3
2. Vincent October 10, 2011 at 12:31 pm

Well the short answer why they did it was to avoid the obvious collision with the secular accreditation committee.

From a political view the problem was caused both by what the university was teaching and by Michigan Conference voting to defund it from subsidy.

Assuming the leaders have worked behind the scenes to placate the Michigan Conference folks the issue will go away as a public issue and that is what is desired by the leadership.

It's easier to silence Michigan than it is to fight the accreditation battle.

(Quote)

Like or Dislike: 3 3

3. Ken October 10, 2011 at 1:13 pm

That's very astute Vincent.

Anybody thought about picketing the LSU biology classes or the offices of the Church leadership? Holly? Faith? Bill? How deep is your conviction and courage?

Your agnostic friend
Ken

(Quote)

Like or Dislike: 2 7

4. Holly Pham October 10, 2011 at 2:10 pm

Ken: That's very astute Vincent. Anybody thought about picketing the LSU biology classes or the offices of the Church leadership? Holly? Faith? Bill? How deep is your conviction and courage? Your agnostic friend Ken

Picketing or similar tactics will not work with people who live and work in isolated positions, such as administrators and academics. They are generally unresponsive to anything except a threat to their job or position.
And, I, Bill, Faith, or even Shane or Sean represent no direct threat to their positions or power ourselves. Those actually in positions that might be a threat seem to have no interest or conviction to do anything. So, for now, those at La Sierra are “safe!”

(Quote)

Like or Dislike: 4  3

5. David Read October 10, 2011 at 2:13 pm

Vincent, I too assumed that the NAD response was designed to placate WASC, and does not reflect the true feelings of Dan Jackson and the other leaders. But, eventually, duplicity catches up with you, even if you’re a very skillful politician.

Probably the best approach to take with WASC is to be very candid with them and say that we intend to teach creationism at Adventist colleges, and fire those biology faculty who cannot or will not get with the program. If you think you can stop us, WASC, take your best shot, but please understand that we have a lot of money and an army of lawyers.

I don’t think Dan Jackson would be inclined to make that argument, even assuming that he is on our side in this controversy. He comes from Canada, where believing Christians are very much a cowed and intimidated minority, and I imagine he has imbibed the timorous mentality that goes along with that.

One thing is for certain, this isn’t going away as a public issue. I doubt very seriously that the Michigan Conference people would be bullied into re-instating the educational subsidy. And I know that Sean and Shane are not going to drop it, and I know that the majority of Adventists, worldwide and even in the NAD, are on our side.

(Quote)

Hot debate. What do you think? 9  5

6. Jennifer Collins October 10, 2011 at 2:48 pm

Holly, I don’t think we should give up that easily. I am sure Shane can find for us the email addresses of those involved and their bosses in the GC and write a “draft” letter for us to send to them. We can then customize it ourselves and send it to them and ask all of our friends and members of our churches, prayer groups, etc. to do the same and for them to ask their friends to do the same. We should be able to swamp their email boxes with
hundreds if not thousands of messages. Come on Shane, Sean, David (you are the best writer), let’s get going!

(Quote)

Hot debate. What do you think? 7  3

7. Shane Hilde October 10, 2011 at 4:41 pm

Sean,

I’m glad you had some time to chime in. I saw ‘back to square one’ in the comments before I saw your post, and I thought to myself, Sean should write an article titled that. And here it is…

(Quote)

Like or Dislike: 7  2

8. Shawna October 10, 2011 at 7:11 pm

Jennifer is right about the letter writing but we can all write our own letters as well. We must insist on the resignations of all who publicly supported the disgraceful letter by the biologists and trustees. We need leaders with backbones. And united our voices will be heard.

(Quote)

Like or Dislike: 6  2

9. Jennifer Collins October 10, 2011 at 8:34 pm

Of course we can all write our own letters. We are passionate about this. My experience is that if you want other people to act, you make it as easy for them as possible. If someone can find the email addresses, and draft a letter, we can then write to the email addresses and add our own touch to the letter. Then we can forward what we sent to all our friends saying this is the letter we sent to the church officials and trustees. Can you send it or something like it too? See what I mean?

(Quote)
10. Jennifer Collins  October 10, 2011 at 9:00 pm

I don’t understand. Who is disliking my idea? Why? Surely leaders like Sean, Shane and David can organize this. Come on, let’s go!

(Quote)

Like or Dislike: 3  0

11. Ken  October 10, 2011 at 10:36 pm

Dear Jennifer

That’s the spirit!

Might I suggest that a well drafted petition signed by thousands and published on Educate Truth, Adventist Today, Spectrum and forwarded to all Adventist institutions might be more effective.

Shane and Sean have been carrying the load at Educate Truth. How about Bill, or Faith or Holly or David or you stepping forth to draft the Petition?

Your agnostic friend
Ken

(Quote)

Like or Dislike: 0  0

12. Jennifer Collins  October 10, 2011 at 10:41 pm

Thanks Ken. Maybe it is too much to ask from Shane. He has done so much already.

(Quote)
Like or Dislike: 1 0

13. GMF October 11, 2011 at 5:29 am

@Jennifer Collins:
I certainly agree that a letter should be composed that could be signed by all who have an interest in the matter.

I continue to have serious reservations about Jackson’s fervor when it comes to supporting literal six day creation; I’m not implying he personally does not subscribe to the Biblical account but that the easy way out is more*diplomatic*.

(Quote)

Like or Dislike: 1 0

14. Johnny Vance October 11, 2011 at 5:33 am

I don’t understand why our educational institutions have ignored counsels from the Spirit of Prophecy. We are clearly told to NOT seek secular accreditation. Why do we care about WASC? Do we lack in faith to believe that God will uphold the credibility of His institutions?

Let all be reminded that Ivy league schools like Harvard DO NOT have accreditation. Their reputation precedes them. The Lord can do the same for His.
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

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.”

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

La Sierra’s Thaine B. Price Science center.
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.”

Read the full texts of the both LSU biology faculty/trustee statement and the response by the North American Division leadership.
Joint Proposal of individual La Sierra University Faculty and Trustees

The controversy over the teaching of origins at La Sierra University (LSU) has led us, through informal dialogue, to propose an approach-in-principle to resolving these issues.¹ Notably, our dialogue has been consistent with the suggestions of members of the WASC visiting team (April 2011), that Faculty and Trustees talk directly and collegially with each other about these important matters in light of the unique faith-based mission of our University.

Our Joint Proposal is the result of our dialogues, which by deliberate design were conducted across a wide spectrum of views, with the conceptual input of various scholars and individuals.² From these discussions, we as individual Faculty and Trustees have generated and here propose an approach-in-principle to the teaching of Creation at LSU, which maintains the Seventh-day Adventist faith of our University and the integrity of our science programs.

In our dialogue, we found a solution to be the teaching of Creation as a faith conviction, rather than as science. 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. Nevertheless, faith and science can and should constructively interact.

This approach is based on two core principles:

I. 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.

II. 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.

In accordance with the principles of academic freedom, as appropriate to a faith-based institution, the incorporation of these core values into the curriculum is the responsibility of the faculty of the Department of Biology in their science classes, and of the University Studies faculty in interdisciplinary classes and seminars.

In addition, we suggest the following:

- La Sierra University hosts an NAD Office of Education Summit³ of scientists, biblical scholars, and theologians, who are actively publishing in the peer-reviewed literature on

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¹ Our informal dialogues were indirectly initiated by the formal invitation of President Randal Wisbey to the Biology Faculty to make a presentation to and dialogue with the LSU Board in September of 2009.
² Including the North American Division (NAD) Vice President for Education, Larry Blackmer, who is also a member of the Adventist Accrediting Association (AAA).
³ We are grateful to NAD Vice President for Education Larry Blackmer for proposing the Summit as an NAD-sponsored event where these scholars can gather by themselves to freely engage. He also directly provided documents which helped clarify various salient issues. Vice President Blackmer was especially helpful in communications to resolve some misapprehensions which prevailed between AAA and the LSU Biology Department earlier in the spring.
issues relevant to origins within their respective academic disciplines of the earth sciences, the biological sciences, biblical studies, and the theology of creation—in order to freely discuss together the difficult issues. An NAD Summit would not replace the important role provided for Adventist educators at all levels by the biannual GRI Council (GRICO) meetings, which are so ably run by the Geoscience Research Institute of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. We see the proposed NAD Summit meetings as fulfilling a different and complementary role to GRICO.

- 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.
- Continued dialogue with other thought-leaders and fellow Adventist educators beyond our University, and with members of AAA and the NAD, has been and will continue to be advantageous.

We believe that the ongoing comments and suggestions of our fellow individual colleagues, among Faculty, Trustees, and Administration, especially while the University takes steps regarding the recommendations from WASC and AAA, will be invaluable. This Joint Proposal is the result of us working together as individuals. As members of this faith-based, academic community which we love and serve, we do not presume to speak on behalf of our University, or the Board of Trustees.

Undersigned individual LSU Faculty:

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<td>James Wilson, PhD</td>
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<td>Lloyd Trueblood, PhD</td>
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| L Lee Grismer, PhD    | Natasha Dean, PhD     | Eugene Joseph, PhD    |
| Professor             | Assistant Professor   | Associate Professor   |
| Herpetology, systematics | Microbiology         | Bone cell biology    |

Undersigned individual LSU Trustees who support this Faculty-initiated Proposal:

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<td>Former US Ambassador to Malta</td>
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