

Glacier View Review

By Bonnie Dwyer

On the second day of the second faith and science conference convened by the Seventh-day Adventist Church to consider views on creation issues, inspiration was the topic of the day. Norman Gulley, a professor of systematic theology at Southern Adventist University, began his presentation by speaking kindly of his friend and fellow theologian Fritz Guy, with whom he disagreed.

As Gulley proceeded in a gentle voice, the depth of his disagreement became more significant. He devoted his entire presentation to refuting the one that Guy had made a year before at the first conference. When Gulley finished, the tension in the room was high—Guy was the next presenter on the agenda. How would he respond? Without commenting directly on Gulley's presentation, Guy read his newest paper, which covered many of the points Gulley had addressed. A lively panel discussion followed.

Later at dinner, Guy and Gulley sat at the same table in the dining room and their conversation continued.

That was the beauty of the 2003 Conference, held at Glacier View Ranch in Colorado—it brought together those who disagreed for serious presentations of ideas and for more casual mealtime conversation. After one theological paper, I asked the scientist sitting next to me if the presentation, which seemed to be an attack on science, bothered him.

No, was the answer, because the scientist knew the theologian and understood his position. To know the person made a difference in how the words were perceived. Glacier View succeeded in helping the theologians and scientists know each other better, to help them hear the personal dilemmas that theological and scientific ideas create for individual lives.

Each segment of the program included people with differing ideas. Four papers would be given on a topic and then the presenters sat as a panel and took questions from the audience and from each other. Lively

sessions resulted. This format was a change from the previous year's session at Ogden, Utah, where presentations by people with differing viewpoints were often separated by several days.

When the new format was first suggested at a planning session, conference director Ben Clausen worried that people would become polarized and angry with each other. But that did not happen. Instead it gave papers with opposing viewpoints equal value. The complexity of issues became apparent immediately. Theologians disagreed with theologians and scientists with scientists; in addition, scientists debated theologians. But people talked about their differences to each other. Contrasting ideas heightened the discussions rather than stifling them. These healthy discussions demonstrated the role of the Church at its best—encouraging dialogue.

At the beginning of the conference Clausen stated his goal that this conference should emphasize process over product—"getting acquainted and trying to understand each other over getting some specific report written." And he explained why: "The conference is not just an academic exercise of problem solving. To be helpful for the life of the Church it should emphasize trust and confidence building. Talking face-to-face is so much more beneficial than just reading someone's article. Arriving at some statement may be premature. The goal should be really talking, not just a document."

His goal was accomplished. The fact that the organizers did not publish any papers or reports—a statement in and of itself—meant that no single conclusion was to be drawn from the meetings.

However, there were small topical “reporting” groups that met on a daily basis to summarize ideas within their given fields and to draft lists of questions that needed to be addressed.

Reports on the daily meetings were posted on *Spectrum’s* website—www.spectrummagazine.org, where they can still be read. The small group reports were given on the final day and up to now have not been noted. A summary of the various reports follows.

Biology Report

Fourteen people met in the biology group. They wrote the report in the form of twelve affirmations on the understanding of nature and the methods of science, plus recommendations for teaching methods, as well as a Seventh-day Adventist teacher’s code of professional ethics.

The group affirmed the dynamic nature of life, teaching the process of “evolutionary” change as observed in “microevolution,” plus the idea “that extensive biological change has occurred since creation and that has produced new species.”

On time issues, the biologists affirmed “the belief that nonhistorical studies in biology provide no compelling independent evidence regarding the length of time since creation.” They affirmed the appearance of design throughout life and advocated further development of theories such as Intelligent Design, but they also made a careful distinction between the use of “Design” as an argument in logic versus its usefulness as a guide in experimental science.

Cosmology and Physics Report

The Cosmology and Physics Group concluded that the Church should not affirm any specific scientific model of origins. And although it had four affirmations and six recommendations it ended its report with two theological questions: “Though we do not affirm any specific model of cosmic origins, the Hot Big Bang model is currently regarded by mainstream science as best integrating the known physical evidence. What implications does this model have for SDA theology?”

“Our present understanding of the cosmos reveals

exquisite fine tuning among the physical constants and laws that govern it. What are the theological implications of these fine tunings?”

Geology Report

Recommendations for future research headed the report from the Geology Group. “We agree that the assumption that the whole geologic sequence formed within one year is not biblically required,” members said as a preamble to their recommendation of a thorough review of ecological zonation theory. “We encourage research to develop and test other possible models within a framework of a six-day creation week and recent global flood. We support the process of looking at problems with each other’s models. We need to be tolerant and sensitive to other views.”

Tolerance was apparent in a minority recommendation for a research program that would employ models and frameworks that allow longer periods within the geologic record.

Members of the Geology Group had several suggestions for the next faith-science meeting, which will convene in 2004. They recommended that the Church look forward rather than reviewing geological problems from the past, that time be set aside for specialists to work in breakout groups, that papers be presented by specialists and then followed with responses from two knowledgeable and prepared respondents. They also suggested that not too many theological papers be included.

Inspiration/Revelation Report

The Inspiration/Revelation Group began its report with quotations. The first—the Church’s Fundamental Belief on Scripture (no. 1) describes Scripture as the written Word of God and calls it the infallible revelation of his will.

The second quote, from Ellen White’s *Testimonies for the Church*, emphasized the union of the divine and the human in the production of Scripture. “Those who pronounce upon the inspiration of the Scriptures, accepting some portions as divine while they reject other parts as human, overlook the fact that Christ, the divine, partook of our human nature, that He might reach humanity. In the work of God for man’s redemption, divinity and humanity are combined” (5:747).



The third quotation, from *Selected Messages*, also by Ellen White, focused on the Bible's inspired human authors, and not on the Bible being God's mode of thought and expression. "But God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God's penmen, not His pen. Look at the different writers" (1:21).

Following these three statements were eleven affirmations of Scripture, three denials, and a list of fourteen unresolved issues that circled back to the quotations. The first unresolved issue was "the extent (if any) to which we can distinguish and/or separate the human from the divine in Scripture."

The rest of the list included similar weighty issues: "the relative priority of Scripture and science when there is a perceived conflict"; "how to resolve apparent discrepancies in Scripture"; and "the authorship and unity of Scripture, e.g., the Pentateuch."

Philosophy of Science Report

It was only in the Philosophy of Science Group that anything close to a statement was drafted. This group of thirteen put together a report with a list of the three questions it had discussed: "What are the Christian motives for scientific investigation? What is the nature of scientific inquiry? And what are the limitations of science?"

After listing their answers, the members concluded: "As it functions within the parameters of faith, we affirm the God-given legitimacy and value of scientific investigation. We understand the work of science to be a blessing to God's people for which they should give thanks."

Theology Report

The Theology Group came up with the longest list of questions—twenty-four in relation to the biblical Fall and its implications and thirteen regarding the Genesis Flood. There were seven affirmations of the Christian doctrine of creation, plus a list of five questions concerning that doctrine. Included in this list were: "How do we interpret the account(s) of creation in Genesis—literally, theologically or existentially?" and "How does our understanding of creation influence our understanding of all other Christian doctrines including our ethics and our lives?"

The Theology Group came up with three

denials concerning creation: "(1) That chance alone can produce the marvelous design that is exhibited in the universe. (2) That naturalistic (godless) processes account for the created order. (3) That our existence is pointless because the universe had a chance beginning and will ultimately come to a pointless end."

The weighty matters of the Theology Group's report were balanced with good cheer. The members even included a limerick.

God made a mud-man named Adam,
Then made for the mud-man a madam.
He clothed them with light
To show them off right
And said it was good that He had 'em.

The Theology Group also included an important denial concerning the biblical fall—"Eve was not primarily responsible for the fall of humanity."

These unpublished reports were given on the last day of the conference to an upbeat audience. People who had gathered unsure of just what would happen during their time together left in good spirits with rounds of applause for the organizers. The much-anticipated conference ended after seven days, fifty presentations, ten panel discussions, many break-out group sessions, and analysis of everyone's personality type via the Myers Briggs test.

Now all the questions center on 2004. The third phase in the three-year process of conferences will convene in Denver, Colorado. It will have an international focus similar to the first conference in Ogden, Utah.

Reflecting on the 2003 conference, one participant observed that in spite of all the conversation, no one's mind had changed. Theologians Gulley and Guy, for instance, agreed to disagree about how they read the Bible and view Scripture.

Glacier View showcased the complexity of the Adventist discussion of faith and science, complicated by disagreements among theologians and scientists in addition to basic disagreements that normally arise between faith and science. Honoring that complexity and the depth of the questions asked in 2003 is now the responsibility of organizers for the 2004 conference.

Bonnie Dwyer is editor of *Spectrum* magazine.