

Statements on Faith and Science from the Divisions

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During 2003 and the first part of 2004 several Divisions have held Faith and Science Conferences in their territories. The participants have been church administrators, religion teachers, and scientists. A number of these Conferences produced consensus statements describing the understanding of the participants of some of the fundamental issues and where they collectively stand with respect to them and the biblical doctrine of creation. We share those statements with you not only to keep you informed concerning developments in the field of science and faith within the church, but particularly to motivate you to study them and join in the reaffirmation of our commitment to the biblical doctrine of creation.

In general, the statements share a number of common features. I am referring to two of them in this article. First, they all recognize the importance of exploring the tensions and challenges that the church confronts in the field of faith and science. They imply that since we exist in a scientific era we have no choice but to interact with the data and its scientific interpretation. Second, they acknowledge that at the present time the scientific interpretation of the data and some aspects of the data itself are difficult to reconcile with the biblical description of the origin of life on the planet. There is a conflict between scientific theories of origins along the lines of natural evolution and the doctrine of creation. Third, the statements also establish that the participants are willing to live with that tension while at the same time giving priority to the biblical understanding of origins. We hope that access to this information may be of help to you in your respective fields. The following are statements drafted by the representatives of the South Africa-Indian Ocean Division and the Euro-Africa Division.

I. Faith and Science Conference: Affirmations and Recommendations--South Africa-Indian Ocean Division, 2003

The church, in the fulfillment of its mission, confronts a world in which science plays a significant role in defining the understanding of the natural world in terms of natural evolution. In that setting it is impossible for the church to ignore the issues raised by science in the area of origins and the challenges they pose to the Adventist biblical doctrine of creation. The fact that the theory of evolution in the form of theistic evolution is already impacting a small number of Adventist theologians and scientists makes it absolutely necessary for the church to reaffirm its doctrine of creation. This reaffirmation should include the following elements:

1. *God the Creator:* We believe that the transcendent God of love through His Son, our Lord, brought into existence the universe and everything in it as an expression of love. Everything He created was very good in nature and function. Although He chose to dwell among His creatures, He is not part of the created universe but sustains and preserves it through the power of His word. He is the personal God who after the fall of humans into sin sent His Son to restore us to fellowship with Him.
2. *Creation in Seven Literal Days:* We uphold the literal, historical, and theological interpretation of Gen 1-2. Such a reading provides a solid and unique foundation for the Sabbath commandment and for humans the duty to submit in humble obedience to it. During the week of creation, on the sixth day, God created the human race in His own image. When humans came out of the hand of the Lord they existed in perfect harmony with God, with each other, and with the natural world. Death and suffering were not part

of their existence. We also maintain that when science is properly interpreted it will be in perfect harmony with the biblical account of creation.

3. *Sin Damaged God's Creation:* We uphold the literal and historical interpretation of Genesis 2-3. The fall of humans into sin transferred the cosmic controversy to our planet and distorted nature and the human ability to correctly understand it. Unaided reason cannot apprehend the power and wisdom of God revealed in the natural world. Left to ourselves and to our rationality we will never be able to uncover our origin and destiny. God's revelation in the written word must take precedence over scientific conclusions and theories. Confronted with a real or imaginary conflict between faith and science we must uphold the biblical teaching on the subject.

4. *Universal Flood:* We uphold the literal and historical interpretation of Gen 1-11. The universal extent of the flood is clearly taught in Scripture and helps us to understand the history of life on our planet. The evidence of catastrophism found throughout the world is to be interpreted in terms of the universal flood.

5. *The Role of Ellen G White in the Adventist Understanding of Origins:* While we affirm Scripture as our rule of faith and practice, we also recognize that God has spoken to His remnant people through the prophetic ministry of Ellen G. White. Her reaffirmation of the biblical doctrine of creation in six literal days, of God's rest on the seventh day, and of the universal flood confirms the correctness of our commitment to the biblical teaching in those extremely important areas. Her reaffirmation of a short chronology as taught in the Bible excludes the long periods of times required by natural evolution for the development of life on our planet.

We recognize that Adventist theologians and scientists are not able to answer all the questions raised by the scientific evidence used to support natural evolution and that at the present time they experience some tension between science and the biblical doctrine of creation. But we also know that the evolutionary theory is not able to satisfactorily explain all the scientific evidence, e.g., the origin of human consciousness. We therefore expect Adventist theologians and scientists to uphold the Adventist doctrine of creation in the midst of scientific uncertainty and not to allow science to determine or modify the biblical doctrine of creation.

II. *Final Statement of the International Faith and Science Conference--Euro-Africa Division, 2004*

At the initiative of the Euro-Africa Division a group of forty-six Seventh-day Adventist scientists, theologians and church leaders and two non-Adventist scholars met at Friedensau Adventist University in Germany from March 26-30, 2004, for a dialogue on faith and science issues. This International Faith and Science Conference (IFSC-EUD2004), the first of its kind in Europe, is one of several such meetings in various divisions. The conference provided a starting point for a dialogue on questions, both in theology and science, that challenge the European Seventh-day Adventist Church's understanding and exegesis of the biblical narratives regarding the origin of the earth and its varied life forms. Reconsideration or revision of the Adventist's teaching regarding creation was not the focus or purpose of this conference.

The Seventh-day Adventist view of origins (life and the universe) as the result of creation by God is in tension with the modern world view that explains existence on the basis of wholly natural and random events over long ages. The participants at this conference affirm the following:

- Faith in God, the Creator, and belief in the Bible record is fundamental to Christianity and to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Creation serves as an anchor point in Seventh-day Adventist theology, ethics, lifestyle, and understanding of reality.

- The message of creation is not only restricted to Gen 1 to 11, it is a message throughout the whole Bible. Old and New Testament texts dealing with creation must be studied more closely in order to better understand them. Based on the historical-grammatical interpretation of Scripture, employed by the Seventh-day Adventist church, presentations delivered at this conference provided a creative approach for understanding biblical texts in an enlarged faith-affirming perspective.

- A creation/flood model should inspire us to look at scientific data in new ways.

- Alternatives to the evolutionary model are being developed, based on creation and the great flood. Aspects from different sciences, such as geology, paleontology, biology, archaeology, and anthropology offer the perspective of new hypotheses that are non-evolutionistic.

- Creation is not only descriptive but also prescriptive, e.g., marriage and the Sabbath.

- Effective dialog on the tensions between world views (faith in creation and evolutionism) needs to proceed on a broader basis than simply apologetics and anti-evolution rhetoric.

- The scientific process of finding knowledge is the same for all who do scientific research, both those who adopt evolution and those who adopt creation.

- In its methodology, science is irreplaceable, but not without errors.

- A great need is felt for an improved and more efficient communication and cooperation between institutions, associations, and organizations supporting creation, inside and outside the Seventh-day Adventist church.

- The argument of “intelligent design” is accepted. However, it is an anti-evolutionistic argument which does not require a Christian creator.

- This IFSC-EUD2004 was a good starting point; it is necessary that discussion and further studies continue.

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