

April 30, 2009

**Pastors Jan Paulsen, Don C. Schneider, Ricardo Graham
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
12501 Old Columbia Pike
Silver Spring, MD 20904**

Dear Pastors Paulsen, Schneider, and Graham,

Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ. Like each of you, I am an ordained pastor of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church. I write these words with my heart on full display--from pastor to pastor. This letter concerns the teaching of evolution at La Sierra University. While I am not a formally trained scientist, I am, however, familiar with many of the apologetic, philosophical, and theological issues surrounding the theories of naturalistic evolution. I have made this an area of special study in my life and ministry. So, I feel both comfortable and qualified to speak to the issue, especially in its ecclesiastical ramifications.

It is a matter of incontestable fact that naturalistic evolution is being taught at La Sierra University. This is not in and of itself a bad thing. Evolution should be taught at our denominational universities. But it should be taught as a competing and inimical worldview to the biblical worldview. We need our young people to know what it is they are up against, yes, but when naturalistic evolution is taught as fact or as the preferred and normative worldview, then we can be sure that the enemy has breached our lines.

There is no point in equivocating. I have seen the class materials with my own eyes. Frankly, I think every Seventh-day Adventist deserves to see them. Our people need to know what is happening. Many of them have heard various rumblings, but being the conscientious, confiding, and hopeful people they are, they have generally assumed the very best. We are making capital of their trust.

In 2003, I preached a two-week evangelistic meeting on the Loma Linda University campus. The event was student-led and university-sponsored. Many students from La Sierra University attended those meetings, and I personally visited with many of them. They told me what was being taught in some of their science classes. I shall never

forget the looks and questions of unadorned incredulity that I witnessed among those students. I have talked to many more since. “What should I do?” “Should I say something?” “Should I just attend a non-SDA school?” “Do our leaders know about this?” “How come these people are allowed to teach at a Seventh-day Adventist University?” These young people, and many others like them, are justifiably nonplussed. Frankly, I share their confusion!

What deeply concerns me is that the faith of many students, who look up to their Adventist professors as more than just academic instructors, but also as spiritual leaders, is being undermined. Jesus’ words in Luke 17:1, 2 about causing “one of these little ones to stumble” carry inestimable weight, and they should be reason enough to propel us to responsible action. Brethren, what are we doing and allowing? Will not God hold us accountable in our respective spheres for what happens on our watch?

I am aware, of course, that the church’s governmental structure gives institutions like La Sierra University a necessary degree of administrative freedom. This is a good and wise arrangement. But this freedom, surely, is not synonymous with virtually unaccountable autonomy. La Sierra University is, after all, a denominational university. If the board has not yet adequately addressed this matter, then doesn’t that evince a kind of complicity, if not outright mismanagement and denominational disloyalty? I genuinely ask, at what point is La Sierra University’s board accountable and answerable to you men and the levels of church government that you represent? When, if ever, can someone step in and save our children and the institutions they attend?

Governing and administrative structures are not the church. The people are the church. The governing and administrative structures are the scaffolding of the church. Scaffolds are for building and strengthening a thing; they are not the thing itself. But what if some are using the scaffolding to tear down the very church they were commissioned and created to build up? What then? I genuinely want to know. Where does the buck stop?

Perhaps you feel that your hands are tied by policy and protocol. But surely they cannot be tied completely. What should I, as a church

pastor, do if someone is teaching doctrine that undermines the church's biblical positions in one of my Sabbath School classes? Wouldn't it be expected of me, the pastor--shepherd--of the flock, to address it? To ask this question is to answer it. Of course, I would work through the Sabbath School council and the church board, but you can be sure that I would deal with the problem. My conference president, to say nothing of my Lord, would surely hold me in contempt if I told him lamely that my hands were tied, no?

Furthermore, the greater the errancy, the greater the urgency. As even a cursory analysis plainly reveals, few doctrines are at greater philosophical odds with Seventh-day Adventism than naturalistic evolution, the arguments of well-meaning theistic evolutionists notwithstanding. Our Magna Carta is Revelation 14:6-12. If naturalistic evolution is true, Creation is cremated, the Sabbath is sabotaged, and our very name is neutered. What becomes of Scripture? And of our unique eschatology? We are not talking about bongo drums, wedding bands, and Christmas trees here.

If our hands are tied, then surely we must let an unfaltering love for God, for His Word, and for His young people dash these fetters into so many deserved pieces! We must do something. You must do something.

Who knows but that you have come to your positions for such a time as this. My ministry places me in somewhat of a unique situation in the world church. In partnership with the Central California Conference, I run ARISE, a mission training school that has seen hundreds of young people over the last seven years. I also have the privilege of preaching regularly on 3ABN and the Hope Channel. Too, I travel all over the world holding evangelistic meetings and preaching at camp meetings, youth conferences, weeks of prayer, etc. I genuinely feel that I have my finger on the pulse of the "average lay person" in the Seventh-day Adventist church the world over. Especially the young people ages 15 to 30. I can say with unblinking confidence that God is working in His church! Praise Him!

I just arrived home from the Youth Mission Congress in Frankfurt, Germany. Over 1600 young people attended the meetings. Night after night I preached the Adventist message--I preached Christ! The theme

chosen for the congress was Follow the Bible, and what an indescribable joy it was to see, at the end of my last sermon, hundreds and hundreds of young people streaming forward. All of them had personal decision cards in their hands. A beautiful, five-foot-tall wooden Bible had been constructed for just this moment. On the side of the Bible was a slot designed to receive the decision cards the young people clutched in their surrendered hands. One by one, each placed his or her card in the Bible. The symbolism was rich and thrillingly profound. It was impossible to not be moved at a fundamental level as each eager young person placed their decision, and thus their life in that wooden Bible. My translator openly wept at the sight. "We will follow the Bible," they were each saying. All over the world, God's people--and in particular, it seems, His young people--are saying We will follow the Word--the Living Word, Jesus, and the Written Word, the Bible.

God has entrusted us with these young people. They are His. He has given us His wise counsel to raise up institutions of learning to educate, equip, and empower them. To build them up.

But what do we do when one of our institutions turns from this inestimably important responsibility, a responsibility that is fraught with eternal significance and involves the souls of those Jesus died to save? This is what I want to know.

And so do many, many others.

I thank each of you for your time, and, in advance, for your thoughtful responses.

Sincerely,
David Asscherick
Director, ARISE