Fostering Civil Discourse on Science and Faith

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FOSTERING CIVIL DISCOURSE ON SCIENCE AND FAITH

Students, faculty, and community members packed the science building lecture hall as they waited for “An Origins Conversation with Darrel Falk and Todd Wood.” The event was organized by the Science and Faith Club, a student-driven group.

“The goal of the Science and Faith Club is to encourage difficult conversations about science and faith in a safe environment,” says Brooke Altena, co-leader of the club. “Dordt graduates will interact with people with different values—we should learn in college how to address them in a Christ-like manner.”

The two panelists presented opposing Christian viewpoints on the question of human origins. Todd Wood is the founder of the Core Academy of Science, an organization devoted to helping Christians understand science from a young-earth perspective. Darrel Falk is a senior adviser at BioLogos, an organization that sees the harmony between science and biblical faith through an evolutionary understanding of God’s creation. Mediating the panel was Rob Barrett, director of forums and scholarship at the Colossian Forum, an organization committed to “equipping leaders to transform cultural conflicts into opportunities for spiritual growth and witness.”

Falk and Wood have recently coauthored a book, titled The Fool and the Heretic: How Two Scientists Moved Beyond Labels to a Christian Dialogue about Creation and Evolution. The book—like the panel discussion—explores how two scientists can hold opposing views, while maintaining Christian love and fellowship.

After each panelist presented his view, Barrett pointed to the venom sometimes spewed between groups who disagree.

“We have to ask if Christians have another way forward,” Barrett said. “Often we ask ourselves how to quickly solve a problem and get on with things. Instead, we should ask, ‘How can we be faithful while this disagreement remains?’”

Barrett reminded everyone that the discussion was happening in the presence of God and asked the group to pray together prayers of praise, lament, and hope. It brought six-day creationists and Christian evolutionists together at the feet of God, in humility, realizing that in this life, we do not have all the answers.

The Science and Faith Club hopes that Dordt can continue to be a place where students can wrestle with how to handle sensitive or divisive topics like this with grace.

To know whether we are addressing these issues well, Barrett asked, “Do we see the fruit of the spirit in our discussions? Count others as more important in Christ? Or do we see a hardening, a pushing away from one another?”

When faced with deep disagreement, how ought a Christian to act? Can we reach into the other’s world to repair some of the damage done? If we can, Barrett argued, distrust and defenses become weaker. This is a miracle of the Holy Spirit.

“Learning to address controversial topics in a grace-filled way is essential for us as students to become effective kingdom citizens,” says Chloe Hansum, club co-leader. “It is a key way to represent Christ to others. In Ephesians, Paul calls us to be humble and patient, and to bear with one another in love. Although our differences are important, we cannot let these differences break our unity in Christ.”

KATE HENRECKSON

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