



ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
THE LUTHERAN CHURCH-MISSOURI SYNOD

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Gary Wayne Jensen. Pastor

June 3, 2009

Dr. Loren Kramer
Chairman of the CTCR of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
St. Louis, Missouri 63122

Dear Dr. Kramer,

Please consider the following accompanying documents pertaining to the question of the legitimate interpretation of the creation days of Genesis chapter one.

1. Correspondence between Gary Jensen and the Office of the President (Dr. Jerry Kieschnick).
2. Correspondence between Gary Jensen and Dr. Paul Maier.
3. “The Biblical Demand to Take Another Look.” My exegetical and theological foundation for interpreting the days of creation as non-24 hour days.
4. “The Heavens Declare the Glory of God.” The outline for my power-point presentation on the scientific evidence for the Big Bang.
5. “Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Statements on Creation.” I respond point-by-point to four major LCMS position statements on creation. These responses are found in the footnotes which follow each respective document.

Recently I wrote to President Kieschnick asking for his opinion on my belief in creation through the Big Bang. He replied to me that my accordance with the LCMS is to be measured by the standard of the 1932 statement titled, “*A Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod.*” In response to his challenge, I affirm that my beliefs are in accord with the Synod. However, my affirmation is only possible because the position statement of 1932 is so very poorly written. Quite apart from the actual contents, the very flow of its argumentation shows little theological care. My critique of that statement, together with three other LCMS statements pertaining to creation are contained in the fifth document cited above.

I must ask how it is possible that the LCMS retains its commitment to a document that was drafted nearly 80 years ago. What has happened in science in the intervening years is not trivial. To the contrary, the previously-held scientific consensus of an eternal and self-existing

universe has been utterly overthrown by Big Bang cosmology which has now demonstrated that the universe had a beginning. The scientific evidence for this beginning is based on observation and not speculation. Unlike Darwinism and the notorious gaps in the fossil record, there are no unexplained “gaps” in the Hubble record. Indeed, the case for a Creator and Designer of the universe is both massive and compelling. The laying out of the specific evidence in its favor can be found in my outline referenced above, “The Heavens Declare the Glory of God.”

As for the matter of biblical interpretation, I do not believe it is legitimate for the LCMS to bind its pastors and leaders to a specific position on the days of Genesis one. At the very least it must be conceded that the language of the Hebrew text is ambiguous. Godly theological scholars who are gifted in the ancient languages can be found on both sides of this question. No exegetical certainty exists that can legitimately bind the conscience to a specific position on this matter. It should also be noted that the Lutheran Confessions take no position on the days of Genesis one that would bind Lutherans to the young-earth position.

On the other hand, there are solid exegetical grounds for interpreting the days of creation as indefinite periods of time (epochs). My case for this position (the “day-age” position as it is called), is laid out in the third document referenced above, titled, “The Biblical Demand to Take Another Look.” Please notice that the sub-title highlights my paper as a rebuttal to the direct challenge of the LCMS, namely, “*Unless there is a compelling reason, on the basis of the biblical texts themselves...we are to believe God created the world in six-24-hour days.*” My paper offers at least ten *exegetical* reasons for non-24-hour days. It also fields a host of challenges posed by the “young-earth” position. And it lays out the theological case for embracing Big Bang cosmology in our calling to evangelize our world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. You may notice that on page one I include two LCMS scholars in my list of Christian leaders who grant legitimacy to the day-age position. Dr. Paul Maier (please note the enclosed correspondence) has been especially generous in his words of encouragement to me.

There is much more that I am prepared to say on these matters. But for the sake of brevity I will rest my case on the five documents I have laid before you. I am confident in my position. For that reason I am not content to seek merely the approval by the CTCR Board. I desire to play a role in moving the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod away from its rigid young-earth position and toward an openness to the day-age interpretation. In this way our synod, building on our strong heritage of the Bible as the Word of God, will engage far more effectively with our culture in our witness to the truth of the God of the Bible. Therefore, I ask you, what steps I can take to bring this matter before Assembly for the reconsideration of its traditional interpretation of the days of Genesis one.

In service to Christ our Lord and Savior,

Gary Wayne Jensen, Pastor

July 9, 2009

Pastor Gary Wayne Jensen
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Dear Pastor Jensen:

Thank you for your recent correspondence regarding the LCMS stance on science and faith, including your essay "The Biblical Demand to Take Another Look," your June 3, 2009 letter to CTCR Chairman Dr. Loren Kramer, and your e-mail of June 28, 2009. Given the press of ongoing responsibilities and previous commitments, this response has taken longer than I would have wished. I do apologize for the delay in responding to your concerns.

In your email of June 28 you ask, "Are you able to tell me when my concerns will be acted upon?" Similarly, your letter of June 3 to Dr. Kramer appears to assume that the documents you have prepared will be formally considered for "approval by the CTCR Board." I will present your request to the CTCR at its next regularly scheduled meeting on Sept. 21-23, 2009. I can inform you already now, however, that because of its heavy workload and the nature of the official responsibilities entrusted to it by the Synod (see pages 174-177 of the 2007 *Handbook* of the Synod) it is simply not possible for the CTCR to respond to the many requests that it receives from individuals, pastors, congregations, circuits (etc.) to review and evaluate materials or to prepare documents on specific issues of concern. For this reason, it has been the long-standing practice of the CTCR to place on its agenda only those assignments that it receives through official Synod channels (e.g. Synod or District conventions, pastors' conferences, Synod and District presidents, etc.).

As Rev. Larry Krueger indicated in his letter to you of February 19, 2009, the CTCR has been given responsibility for responding to dissent from the official position of the Synod (Bylaw 1.8.2). On the basis of your correspondence, however, it is unclear to me whether or not (or in what way) you consider yourself to be dissenting from the official position of the Synod. First, in your letter of June 3, 2009 to Dr. Kramer you state, "I affirm that my beliefs are in accord with the Synod. However, my affirmation is only possible because the position statement of 1932 is so very poorly written." On its face, this states that you are not in dissent from Synod's position on creation, even though you are disappointed in its articulation and argumentation in the *Brief Statement*.

Second, your paper "The Biblical Demand to Take Another Look" is largely a rebuttal to a statement contained in an FAQ from the Synod's website. This FAQ states (emphasis added) that "*It has generally been taught* in our church that unless there is a compelling reason, on the basis of the biblical texts themselves, to understand the six days of the Genesis accounts as anything other than normal 24-hour days, we are to believe that God created the world in six 24-hour days (see Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation, Question 97 [CPH, 1986, p. 106])." It is accurate to say, I believe, that this view of the creation account "has generally been taught" in the LCMS. It is important to note, however, that responses to FAQs found on the Synod's website do not, as such, constitute "the official position of the Synod." Nor does this FAQ assert that the Synod has spoken officially on the question of the precise length of the days of creation. Another FAQ on the Synod's website (also referenced in your correspondence) makes it clear that the LCMS "does not have an official position on the precise 'age of the earth'"

(www.lcms.org?2207). I am not personally aware of any LCMS resolution or doctrinal statement that specifically makes reference to the days of creation in Genesis 1 as “24-hour days.”

For these reasons, it is not clear to me whether you are, in fact, dissenting from the doctrinal position of the LCMS. If you believe you are in dissent, then Rev. Krueger’s letter has laid out the direction for you to follow. In my view, the letter to Dr. Kramer of June 3, 2009 does not constitute a formal expression of dissent because it does not identify which doctrinal resolution(s) and or statement(s) of the Synod you believe to be contrary to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, nor does it articulate the nature of your dissent from an official resolution(s) or statement(s) of the Synod.

On the other hand, if you are not in dissent, then the appropriate method for you to follow in seeking to clarify and strengthen the Synod’s teaching on creation is different. In this case, I would encourage you to continue to study this issue and discuss it with as many of your peers as possible. In addition, continue writing and speaking on this topic which concerns you so deeply. You might also seek publication of your position in one of our seminary journals, or some other venue. Ultimately, if you continue to believe that it would be helpful for the CTCR to address this issue, you might consider encouraging your congregation to submit an overture to the next synodical convention (2010) or offer this as a suggestion at an upcoming pastors’ conference in your district.

Finally, it may be of interest to you to note that at its meeting in September the CTCR will be considering a request generated by a consortium of Concordia University professors to place on its agenda an assignment on the relationship between science and theology. If the Commission responds positively to this request, it is quite possible that the kinds of issues raised in your correspondence will be discussed and addressed in some way in conjunction with this assignment.

We wish you God’s grace in Christ Jesus and His Spirit’s wisdom and guidance as you consider these important matters.

Sincerely,

Joel D. Lehenbauer
Executive Director
JDL:bh

Rev. Gary Jensen
Zion Lutheran Church, Snohomish, WA
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