

The LCMS' Bondage to Non-Biblical "Boundaries"

"You leave the commandment of God and cling to human tradition." – Jesus in Mark 7:8

In 2017, Concordia University Nebraska professor Dr. John Jurchen aroused strong criticism from LCMS officials for an article that he wrote titled, "The Age of the Earth and Confessional Lutheranism."¹ Indeed his article raised such ire that he retracted it upon the insistence of his critics.² In support of their censure Dr. Charles Arand wrote, "As a church we have...maintained that within our confessional and doctrinal **boundaries** there is room for discussion, debate, and even disagreement on matters that do not transgress or redraw the **boundaries** /...I hope and pray that [our periodical] will serve a helpful place within the church, where we meet as theologically trained servants in the church to discuss and ultimately confess only that to which the Scriptures commit us"³ (boldface mine). It is my judgment that these two themes of Dr. Arand be cannot be reconciled with each other. Furthermore, for the reason that *sola Scriptura* (the Word alone) is among the four major "*solas*" that Luther proclaimed, neither can the LCMS' commitment to an arbitrary "boundary" that can't be sourced in the Bible be reconciled with Luther's Reformation as he exemplified by his steadfast stance at the Diet of Worms.

It is my considered judgment that the "boundaries" which Dr. Arand highlights (the insistence of the LCMS that the creation "days" are approximately 24-hour, and that death in the animal kingdom began as a consequence of Adam's Fall), cannot be proven from the texts which the LCMS has correctly determined to be authoritative and theologically binding. They include both the Holy Bible and the Lutheran Confessions contained in the Book of Concord. Consequently, this posture effectively prohibits the open inquiry which the Reformation requires: to follow the biblical evidence where it leads.

It is one thing to laud the Bible as God-breathed Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16) in an *abstract* sense in the manner of current LCMS practice. But it is an altogether different matter to painstakingly study it (Acts 17:11) to the end that its actual *contents* might scrutinize our assumptions and transform our theological thinking (Romans 12:2). Although I write here as an ancient-universe creationist (AUC), my point *here* is not to prejudice readers to favor my position, but instead to freshly re-open the question. For if our theological deliberations about creation are naively straightjacketed by our *prior* assumptions, then we will have deceived ourselves into imagining that we have exhausted our biblical exegesis (2 Timothy 2:15). In this light, the only boundary that is legitimate in our task of interpreting Genesis 1 is to submit to the text itself.

I suggest your consideration of the following three of my essays which can serve as guideposts in the task of understanding the first chapter Genesis chapter: 1) "The Biblical Demand to Take Another Look: Ten Exegetical Reasons the Creation Days of Genesis are Non-24 Hour," 2) "How Genesis 1:1 Easily Accommodates the Big Bang," and "Defusing the Alleged Conflict Between Scientific Fact and the Text of Genesis 1 Without Compromising Either One." They can all be accessed at my website: www.christianityontheoffense.com.

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¹ Dr. John Jurchen. *Concordia Journal: A Partner Issue with Concordia University Nebraska*. (Concordia Seminary, St. Louis MO., Summer 2017), p. 64f.

² Charles Arand. "Regarding the Editorial Process for the Concordia Journal." *Concordia Journal*. Concordia Lutheran Seminary, St. Louis, MO. (Winter, 2018), p. 10.

³ Charles Arand. "Reflections on Reactions to the Summer Issue of the Concordia Journal." *Ibid*, pp. 8, 9.

