



CONCORDIA SEMINARY

An Open Letter to Our Brothers in the Wyoming District

December 1, 2017

Dear Brothers,

We are writing to you with regard to our life together as fellow pastors in the ministerium of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

We were greatly saddened to receive word of a resolution adopted by you at the fall district pastors conference Oct. 4, 2017, regarding the article by Dr. John Jurchen entitled, "The Age of the Earth and Confessional Lutheranism," which appeared in the summer 2017 issue of our *Concordia Journal*. Two concerns came to mind upon reading your resolution.

Our first concern is with how we relate to one another when we run across statements in writings that seem to be unclear, confusing, questionable or perhaps even wrong. Should we immediately assume the worst and conclude that the author is promoting false doctrine that must be condemned – even when the author or publication has not provided cause for such a reading? And should our first response to error – perceived or actual – not be to seek clarification or correction from the author? A resolution that states, "Wyoming District Pastors Conference condemn this article for its false doctrine and for sowing discord among brethren" and then calls upon a number of others to issue "the same condemnation" at the very least leaps to a judgment that may not be warranted when a conversation may have made any such action unnecessary. This is a sad commentary on our life together as a Synod and our respect for one another as brothers and co-workers in ministry.

Our second concern is with the treatment of the issue itself. Dr. Jurchen clearly states at the beginning of his article that he is attempting to answer in a responsible way questions raised by a parishioner, paying attention to statements the Synod has made on the issue. Did the article receive a fair reading and a thorough discussion at your conference with regard to its purpose, thesis, arguments and conclusion? Were questions raised and discussed about the Synod statements that Dr. Jurchen cites and why they are not more explicit about the issue he was addressing? To us, these seem to be important questions. After all, there is no church like the Lutheran tradition that seeks to be *fiercely textual* (as a colleague puts it) so as not to say *less* than Scripture says but also not to say *more* than Scripture says.

At this juncture, we are primarily concerned with how we may best live together as a church and with one another as brothers in the church's ministry. This is not to say that false teaching is not a serious matter. Of course it is! And it is not to say that we should not deal with it appropriately – especially when it is persistently promoted and defended. Such a practice is the model set for us by the Preface to the Book of Concord whose authors stated about their own condemnations: "it is our will and intention thereby to condemn only the false and seductive teachings of *the stiff-necked teachers* and

blasphemers of the same..." [italics added] (Par 13, Kolb-Wengert edition), that is, those who refuse to engage in conversation, to reconsider or refuse to reconcile.

In the interest of leaving no doubt as to where we stand and what we teach on the subject of creation, we can unequivocally state that we hold to and teach in accordance with the Brief Statement's paragraph on creation, both its thesis and antithesis, which reads:

We teach that God has created heaven and earth, and that in the manner and in the space of time recorded in the Holy Scriptures, especially Gen. 1 and 2, namely, by His almighty creative word, and in six days. We reject every doctrine which denies or limits the work of creation as taught in Scripture. In our days it is denied or limited by those who assert, ostensibly in deference to science, that the world came into existence through a process of evolution; that is, that it has, in immense periods of time, developed more or less of itself. Since no man was present when it pleased God to create the world, we must look for a reliable account of creation to God's own record, found in God's own book, the Bible. We accept God's own record with full confidence and confess with Luther's Catechism: "I believe that God has made me and all creatures."

This is a wonderfully crafted statement that begins with a confession of God as creator of heaven and earth and then concludes with its significance for us as expressed by Luther's catechism. In other words, what do we confess with the affirmation that God is creator? We confess, "I am God's creature!" (LC II 13).

We recognize the article in question has generated concern regarding some of its statements and conclusions, some of which our faculty shares, and we are aware that some of the points could have been stated more clearly. In fact, the article has generated discussion within our faculty, and we are looking forward to continuing that conversation with the entire Synod. As a beginning toward that end, and in the interest of strengthening our life together and clarifying our witness to the world, we are preparing a series of posts that provide an orientation to the debate currently taking place in evangelical circles along with an assessment of our Lutheran take on these issues. These will be posted on concordiatheology.org.

Given these acknowledgements, we respectfully request that you retract your resolution and engage the author and us in conversation. It is difficult to see how such an overture as has been adopted will not cast a cloud of suspicion over the author, Concordia University, Nebraska, and the seminaries (particularly Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, in whose *Concordia Journal* this particular article appeared). Luther calls us to something higher when he teaches us not to slander or defame our neighbor but instead to honor God by "speaking well" of our neighbor and "explaining everything in the kindest way."

In Christ,

The faculty of Concordia Seminary