

Issues, Etc.TM

JOURNAL



*More Questions
for Old-Earth Creationists*

by Todd Wilken

*Wittenberg Trail:
What Will it Be:
Glib, Facile Cleverness or Holy Zeal?*

by David Ramirez

Fall, 2013



Dear *Issues, Etc. Journal* Reader,

Greetings in the name of Jesus.

In this edition of the *Journal*, a decade after I posed a [few questions for Old-Earth Creationists](#), I have a few more. Does the theory of Old-Earth Creation confess what the text of Scripture says about Creation? Would the Old-Earth Creationist be better off ignoring the Genesis account altogether, given the problems the text poses to his theory? Read on.

Our Wittenberg Trail feature is from Pastor David Ramirez. He tells the story of his path from Liberal Lutheranism with its Gospel Reductionism, superficial cleverness and excuse-making, to the honesty, clarity and zeal of the true Reformation.

You'll also find a list the congregations of the **Issues, Etc. 300** at the end of the *Journal*.

Enjoy the *Journal*.

Wir sind alle Bettler,

Todd Wilken, host
Issues, Etc.

A handwritten signature in grey ink that reads "Todd Wilken". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. The first name "Todd" is written in a larger, more prominent script, while "Wilken" follows in a similar but slightly smaller and more compact script. The ink is a light grey color, and the background is plain white.

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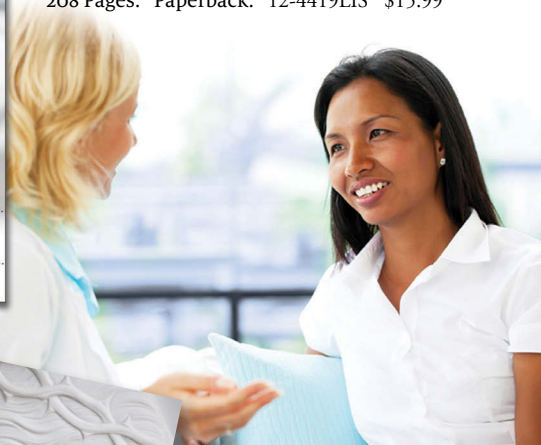
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More Questions for Old-Earth Creationists

by Todd Wilken

The doctrine of Creation, like every teaching of Scripture, is finally a matter of confessing what Scripture says. Either you believe and confess what the Bible says, or you don't.

Like the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection, the Real Presence of the Lord's Supper or Baptismal Regeneration, Creation does not appear to have the science on its side. None of these things can be observed, measured, quantified, tested or repeated under controlled laboratory conditions today.

But, also like the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection, the Real Presence of the Lord's Supper or Baptismal Regeneration, Creation does have the text of Scripture on its side.

So, with any of these doctrines --including Creation-- you either confess what the text of Scripture says about it, or you don't.

Does the theory of Old-Earth Creation confess what the text of Scripture says about Creation? No, it doesn't. And, its proponents shouldn't pretend that it does.

The Old-Earth Creationist wants to keep the idea of a Creator. But, he also wants to accommodate the latest theory of the age of the Universe, about 15 billion years. The Old-Earth Creationist wants to keep the Genesis Creation account. But, rather than read that account as a record of seven consecutive days of God's miraculous creation, the Old-Earth Creationist wants to read it as a record of those 15 billion years. Thus the name "Old-Earth Creationist."

A decade ago, in a short piece called "[Nine Questions for the Old-Earth Creationist](#)" I wrote:

Old-Earth Creationism is the theory that God created the universe over the course of billions of years.

The first principle of Biblical interpretation is to read a text according to its plain, literal sense unless something in the text or its context requires a nonliteral meaning. A good example is Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The plain, literal sense of the text is clear: God created the universe. Nothing in the text itself requires anything other than a literal reading of the words. Nor does anything in the immediate context require the reader to take the text in anything other than its plain literal sense. Indeed, nothing in the broader context of the entire Bible requires anything other than a literal reading of Genesis 1:1.

Old-Earth Creationists do accept the idea of a divine Creator. Old-Earth Creationists generally do accept the sequence of events the Genesis chapter one.

However Old-Earth Creationists reject the interpretation of the word "day" as a literal 24-hour solar day in Genesis one. Instead they interpret the word "day" to mean "epoch", "era" or "age".

Old-Earth Creationists claim to take the text of Genesis chapter one seriously. They simply claim to find no reason in the text of Genesis to conclude that the creation of the universe took a mere six 24-hour days.

The burden of proof lies upon the Old-Earth Creationist to demonstrate his views from the text of Genesis.

To that end, I posed eight questions designed to force the Old-Earth Creationist back into the text of the Genesis account.

- 1. What in the text of Genesis 1 requires or suggests an old Earth?*
- 2. What are the referents of the words "morning" and "evening" in Genesis 1?*
- 3. What in the text of Genesis 1:26-27 requires or suggests the creation of man over millions of years?*

4. *Where in the text of the Genesis 2 and following is the transition from epoch-long days to 24-hour days?*
5. *What creative actions described in Genesis 1 require more than six 24-hour days to accomplish for a God Who creates ex nihilo (from nothing)?*
6. *Where else in Scripture is the word "day" used to designate billions of years?*
7. *How are we to understand the connection between the six epoch-days of creation and the sanctification of a literal seventh day in Genesis 2:1-3 and Exodus 20:11?*
8. *Are there considerations outside the text of Genesis that require an old Earth?*

Of course, the real point of these questions is to demonstrate that the Old-Earth Creationist is not reading the actual text of the Genesis account at all. He is *reading into that text* considerations *outside* the text. He must go outside the text of Genesis, and of Scripture as a whole to support his 15 billion year reading of the Genesis account.

And, these questions are designed to force the old-earth creationist to be honest. If he wants to believe in a 15 billion year old Earth, he is free to do so. But, he cannot, and should not claim the text of Genesis as support, much less as the source of that belief.

More Than Just a Day

The goal of the Old-Earth Creationist is to stretch out the days of Creation in the Genesis account to fit a 15 billion year time frame. Step one is to introduce the possibility that, in Scripture, the word "day" can mean something other than a period of 24 hours.

Here, the Old-Earth Creationist is right. In Scripture, the word "day" doesn't always mean a 24 hour day. The word often means *less than* 24 hours: it can mean only the daylight hours of the day, or only a part of the

24 hours of light and darkness. The word "day" can also mean *more than* 24 hours: it can mean a man's lifetime, it can mean an unspecified, but finite period of time, it can even mean eternity. The word "day" can mean all of these things.

The question is, which of these meanings best fits the text and context of the Genesis account? This is where the real problems begin for the Old-Earth Creationist.

The word "day" doesn't appear by itself in the Genesis account. It appears in a repeated formula that includes four elements:

There was an evening, and there was a morning --the first day.
There was an evening, and there was a morning --the second day.
There was an evening, and there was a morning --the third day.
There was an evening, and there was a morning --the fourth day.
There was an evening, and there was a morning --the fifth day.
There was an evening, and there was a morning --the sixth day.
(Genesis 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31)

The four elements of the formula are 1) "evening," 2) "morning," 3) number, and 4) "day."

If the word "day" means something other than an ordinary 24 hour day, then the words "evening" and "morning" also mean something other than they ordinarily mean with respect to ordinary days. "If "day" doesn't mean "day," what do "evening" and "morning" mean?

The Old-Earth Creationist will usually offer an alternative meaning for these words. "Evening" means "beginning," "morning" means "end."

There are several problems with this explanation. First, the Old-Earth Creationist is hard pressed to find an instance of "evening" and "morning"

meaning "beginning" and "end" elsewhere in Scripture. While that metaphor is common today, it is rare in Scripture.

Second, the phrase "there was an evening, and there was a morning" in the Genesis account is not describing the beginning and end of the time period described. The Bible normally marks days from evening to evening, sometimes from morning to morning, but never from evening to morning. This means that even if "evening" did mean "beginning," "morning" still wouldn't mean "end." The phrase isn't describing the beginning and the end of the day; it is describing the onset of darkness and the onset of light within the 24 hour days of Creation.

Third, even if "evening" and "morning" meant "beginning" and "end," the Old-Earth Creationist still must explain why these terms are in the text at all. The best theory of the age of the Universe does not divide the 15 billion years of the Universe's history into six parts with discrete beginnings and ends. Even if the author of the Genesis account is imposing a completely arbitrary six-part division on those 15 billion years, the Old-Earth Creationist must explain what "evening" and "morning" are intended to describe.

Of course, the simplest explanation of the words "evening" and "morning" in the Genesis account is that they mean the onset of darkness and daylight due to the rotation of the Earth. In other words "evening" and "morning" mean what they usually mean in Scripture and in every day conversation. But, of course, that explanation isn't available to the Old-Earth Creationist.

And, the Old-Earth Creationist's problems don't end there. In fact, they get worse.

The six days of Creation in the Genesis account are numbered -- literally. The English is awkward, but the formula literally reads, "And there

was an evening, and there was a morning --day one... day two... day three" and so forth.

The problem here for the Old-Earth Creationist is that the numbering of the days establishes a sequence that is impossible to rearrange without doing violence to the text (something they claim they don't do). Even more problematic, the events during those days simply do not fit the Old-Earth Creationist's reading of the Genesis account as a 15 billion year record:

Day One:

- 1) The creation of the Earth,
- 2) The creation of light,
- 3) The separation of light from darkness, and
- 4) The naming of day and night.

Day Two:

- 1) The separation of the waters above from below, and
- 2) The naming of the sky.

Day Three:

- 1) The separation of the waters below from the dry ground,
- 2) The naming of land and sea, and
- 3) The creation of plant life.

Day Four:

- 1) The creation of Sun, Moon and stars.

Day Five:

- 1) The creation of sea creature and flying creatures, and
- 2) The blessing of sea creature and flying creatures.

Day Six:

- 1) The creation of land animals,
- 2) The creation of man as the image of God, and
- 3) The blessing of man.

This sequence of days and of the events within those days are a huge problem for the Old-Earth Creationist. He has to make a choice. Either he

accepts the sequence of events in the Genesis account, or he rejects that sequence of events.

If he accepts the sequence, he must reject some of the most basic ideas and theories of astronomy astrophysics, physics, cosmology and evolution. At the very least, he must accept that the Earth formed first, before --billions of years before-- the Sun, Moon and stars. He must also accept that the Earth had liquid water and plant life before the formation of the Sun, Moon and stars. This is why so few Old-Earth Creationists accept the sequence of events in the Genesis account.

Observable Universe



But, if the Old-Earth Creationist rejects the sequence of events in the Genesis account, he still has a serious problem with the account. He must provide alternate meanings for the words "one, two, three, four, five" and "six" thereby rejecting the most basic principles of the mathematics and logic. Here again, the text of the Genesis account provides him no help whatsoever. What does "day three" mean if it is not intended to describe the events after day one and two, and before day four?

As you can see, proposing an alternative reading of the word "day" is linguistic tar baby for the Old-Earth Creationist. He cannot stop with the redefinition of the word "day," The meaning of that word cannot be altered without also altering almost everything else in the account. By the time he is done, very few words of the Genesis account survive in their plain and simple meaning.

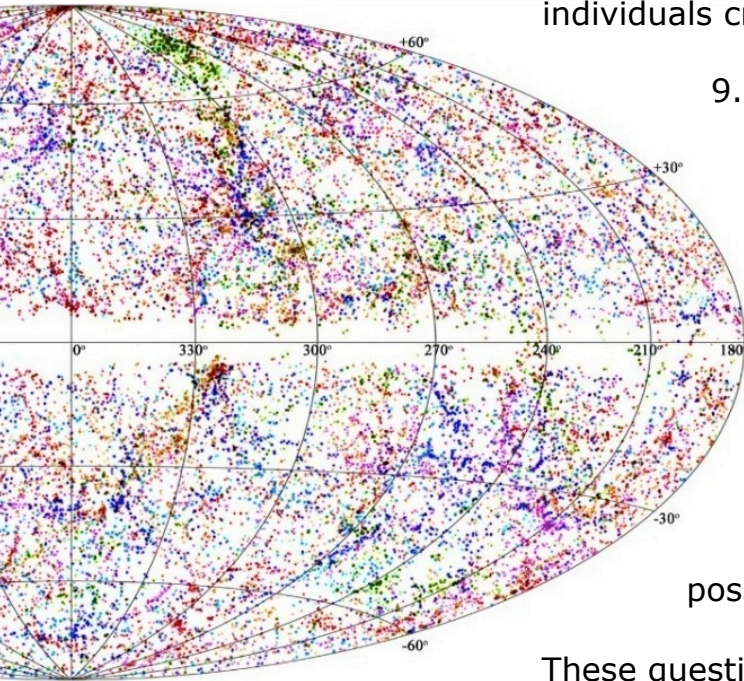
More Questions

Do all Old-Earth Creationists carry the logic of their theory this far? No. But they should. They should be ready to answer some additional questions about their reading of the Genesis account:

1. How do you reconcile the sequence of events recorded in the Genesis account with the prevailing theories of the formation of the Universe -- In particular, the formation of the Earth first before the rest of the Universe, including the Sun, Moon and stars; and the assertion that the early Earth had both liquid water and plant life before the formation of the Sun?
2. What does the numbering of the days in the Genesis account signify, if not six, discrete, sequential days or time periods?
3. How should the six days of Creation in the Genesis account be rearranged to better reflect the actual events of the Universe's 15 billion year history?
4. How should the sequence of events within those individual days be rearranged to better reflect the actual events of the Universe's 15 billion year history?
5. If the six days of the Genesis account are really six parts of the Universe's 15 billion year history, how long was the seventh day described in Genesis 2:1-4?
6. To what specifically does the seventh day of Genesis 2:1-4 correspond in the Universe's 15 billion year history?
7. What is the real chronological relationship between the events describing in Genesis, chapter one (the six days of Creation), and Genesis chapter two (the specific creation of man)? Is the second

chapter a reiteration of the sixth day, focusing on man, or it is an event separate from and subsequent to the six days described in the first chapter?

8. What is the real chronological relationship between the events describing in Genesis, chapter one, and Genesis chapter three? Does the Fall described in the third chapter involve the same particular individuals created in chapter two? Are they the same particular individuals created in chapter one?



9. Where in the entire book of Genesis is the transition to "real time"? What in the text itself specifically marks this transition?

10. When the word "day" means something other than 24 hours in Scripture, it most often means a period of *less than 24 hours*. Why ignore this possibility regarding the Genesis account?

These questions further demonstrate that the text of the Genesis account is not the Old-Earth Creationist's friend. It is, in fact, the single greatest obstacle to his theory.

I suggest that the Old-Earth Creationist is better off ignoring the Genesis account altogether, given the problems the text poses to his theory. But, what if the Old-Earth Creationist did just that? What if he chose to ignore the Genesis account altogether? Could he escape the idea of a six, 24 hour day Creation? Not really.

The six-day Creation is written into the DNA of the Bible and its theology. The Old-Earth Creationist might find himself ignoring or reinterpreting much more than just the Genesis account.

On the sixth day of the first week, God created man. On the sixth day of a week many years later, Jesus hung dead on the Cross in as the substitute for all mankind and the sacrifice for all their sins.

On the seventh day of the first week, God rested from all his labors. On the seventh day of a week many years later, Jesus rested from all his labors in the stillness of the tomb.

On the first day of the first week, God began the first Creation. On the first day of a new week many years later, Jesus stepped out of his tomb alive, the firstborn of the new Creation.

As with every teaching of the Bible, you either confess what the text of Scripture says about Creation, or you don't. The Old-Earth Creationist must finally recognize and admit what his theory really confesses, and what it doesn't.

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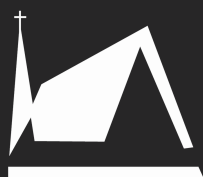
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Wittenberg Trail: *What Will It Be: Glib, Facile Cleverness, or Holy Zeal?*

by David Ramirez

I was born a Lutheran. The church body I was born into was called the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches. It was a group that split from the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) and later participated in the merger that formed the Mainline Liberal denomination, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Concerning the faith, there were many good things about the family and church in which I was raised: a strong emphasis on the Bible and the Catechism; an insistence upon church every Sunday and an active faith life; and an appreciation for the history and liturgy of the church. I was proud of my history and heritage. I believed that those who left the LCMS in the 70's over disputes concerning biblical interpretation, church fellowship issues, and "legalism" were righteous warriors.

Yet this church body had a disease. So did I. This disease is called Gospel-reductionism. I will let one of its major proponents, Edward Schroeder, describe how he believed Luther and the other reformers understood the "gospel":

If there was no way that the Gospel was either abated or abetted by a particular practice or Biblical interpretation, then the confessors were content to ignore it or, at most, to give it skimpy treatment... The reformers did not get excited about one position or its contrary on such questions, so long as these questions stayed—as well they might—on a sub-Gospel level.¹

What this means in practice is that the Scriptures get pitted against the "gospel." The "gospel" is unyoked from the Scriptures, the very Word of God that bears witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and defines what its content is. The result is the denial of the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures and setting up man as judge over them. Also, the Law of God, His eternal will, is dismissed or relegated only to its accusing function. The Law of God becomes merely a foil for a gnostic kind of "gospel." It is therefore no surprise that the Historical-Critical method of biblical interpretation and antinomianism go hand in hand with Gospel-reductionism.

I ran into full-fledged Gospel-reductionism when I went to Valparaiso University for my undergraduate studies. Being an institution founded by LCMS Lutherans, yet independent of the Synod, I thought it would be a perfect fit. Valpo had long been a refuge for more "open-minded" LCMSers and the theology faculty had been, and still was, sympathetic to the Historical-Critical method and Gospel-reductionism.

Yet there were several surgical strikes that did much damage to my mental furniture while at Valpo. From the beginning, I was disturbed by the palpable glee with which many of the professors tore down students' reliance upon the Word of God. Even though at that time I was comfortable with holding a non-literal view of portions of the Scriptures, I was disgusted by the



way those who believed in such things as the Creation accounts were ridiculed and bullied into silence or submission.

If anything characterizes the teaching of Gospel-reductionism I witnessed, and at that time embraced, it is the showy, superficial cleverness and excuse making that accompanies it. Antinomianism's siren call dovetailed perfectly with the temptations and pitfalls of modern hedonistic college life. Praise be to God, that by His Word, the Lord made me dissatisfied with false dichotomies and assumptions thrown about as if they were self-evident. I became increasingly suspicious of the glibly facile manner in which the plain reading of the Word of God was twisted into the opposite of what it said. It was all far too convenient, and for all the rhetoric against pharisaism, far too self-justifying.

Arguing with a Gospel-reductionist is like arguing with a petulant, spoiled child, who thinks anything that he suffers on account of any authority or law in his life, is grave persecution. In reality, the failure of those who shape a Gospel-reductionist is not persecution, but obviously indulgence. Gospel-reductionism's lack of clarity on Law and Gospel, its confusion on Christ and His work of justification, always wrongfully tempers the severity of the Law, and in a diabolical twist, robs the Gospel of its true sweetness.

Changing one's mind often takes a long time. However, the more I reflect on my own experience and observe other people, there are often very particular incidents that drive uncomfortably deep into a person's thought and conscience. It is like a spear driving through armor; it starts with a particular point. And when it drives deep, it must be dealt with. Sometimes there is a difficult extraction; on the other hand, sometimes a deep change is effected.

There are many of those moments that I can think back on in my life when I had to stop and deeply evaluate my beliefs. But instead of trying to cram all the "Aha! moments" of my Wittenberg Trail into a few pages, let me share just one of those spear points that tore deep into my flesh, which was really the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, working upon me.

It happened when I returned to Valpo to begin my last year of college. I had been an exchange student in Germany for the academic year 2001-02. I experienced 9-11 overseas, which was an interesting experience in itself, and I was largely ignorant of the fallout in the LCMS concerning the prayer service at Yankee Stadium where a LCMS clergyman prayed with other Christians and members of other religions. Little did I realize that Valpo was about to become the next flashpoint in that debacle.

I was walking around campus, doing errands and catching up with friends I had not seen for over a year, thinking mostly of how different it was to be back at an American university. I ran into some folks who were headed towards the chapel. They asked me if I was going to the memorial for the victims of the 9-11 tragedy. I confessed that I was not even aware that the university was holding a service.

One student quickly corrected my language. "It isn't a church service."

"What do mean, what is it then?" I replied, "I thought you said it was a prayer service?"

"It is, but it isn't a service, it's a community gathering. Some people in the LCMS are all uptight about Lutherans praying with Muslims and other Christians, and so it is NOT a service. But you should really go."

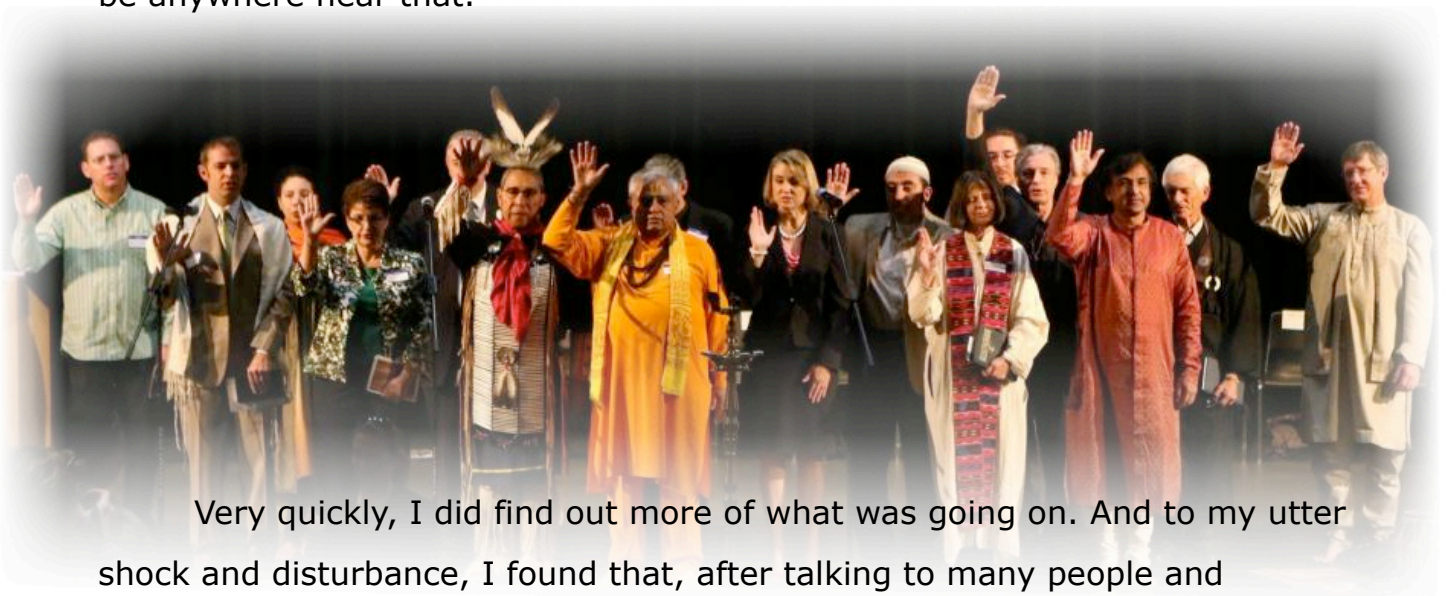
"Wait," I said, "Muslims are going to be praying at this thing and leading worship at the chapel?"

“Yes. Well...no. But we aren’t going to be praying together..”

“Hold on,” I said, “I obviously have missed some controversy since I’ve been gone. But regardless, Muslims don’t worship God. Islam is a false religion. Muslims and Christians praying together makes absolutely no sense whatsoever. ”

I was still curious about what was going to happen at the chapel, but also rather disturbed by what I was hearing. The stories of the Israelites mixing the true worship of the Lord with pagan rituals were floating up from my memory banks.

So I said as our paths parted, “Thanks, but no thanks. I am not going to pretend that I know everything about what’s going on, but I don’t want to be anywhere near that.”



Very quickly, I did find out more of what was going on. And to my utter shock and disturbance, I found that, after talking to many people and reading things written on all sides of the issue, I totally agreed with the nasty, insufferable conservatives of the LCMS! (At least this is how I still thought of the confessional Lutherans of the LCMS.) How was this possible? I thought that my sympathies would always be with the folks in the LCMS who were considered liberals, Seminex sympathizers who never left, fellow sons and daughters of the “promising tradition.”

I knew that the more liberal folks in the LCMS weren't as uptight as those rigid conservatives in the LCMS. But this was insane. The first commandment is dreadfully clear, "You shall have no other gods before me." I suddenly found myself on the same side of those whom I had considered enemies.

I didn't change into a confessional Lutheran overnight. The Lord had more work to do on me through His Word, as He still does. But the Word kept striking deeper as I saw and experienced far more rotten fruit on the tree of liberal Protestantism while I attended an ELCA seminary.

But a large roadblock had been cleared. Perhaps conservative Lutherans also had a point about biblical inerrancy, closed communion and the order of Creation. I needed to re-evaluate. So I read, and thought, a lot. I never finished seminary in the ELCA. After taking some time off to get married, provide for my family, and sort out my future path, I transferred to Concordia Theological Seminary-Fort Wayne to complete my studies to be a confessional Lutheran pastor. The reason why I came to the LCMS is simple. The LCMS confesses the Holy Scriptures to be the Word of God and subscribes to the Book of Concord because it confesses what the Bible confesses.

My family and I also joined the LCMS because of the zeal it has for the Lord. Some people, even some in the LCMS, deride confessional Lutheranism as a "purity cult." But a purity cult is precisely what God has called us to be! We are of course not to be prideful in our own purity or our own understanding; but it is precisely Christ in which confessional Lutherans boast! It is not by our own works, merit, reason, or understanding, but by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that we are saved and made holy. And we are to glory in His holiness, unless we are ashamed of Christ Himself. And

we are to declare His purity and joyfully confess it, unless we think that we are declaring some man-made confession.

My prayer is that confessional Lutherans of the LCMS never lose their zeal. It is an unfortunate thing when Lutherans think that acting overly generous or humble towards those who hold false beliefs will win hearts and minds. You cannot be more generous than Jesus. This is merely playing the game of false humility. Furthermore, liberal Protestants will merely despise you all the more. What all poor miserable sinners need is the Law of God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ clearly and zealously preached. Take my word for it, I remember. But who cares about my word, you don't need it. Hear the Word of the Lord: after recording Jesus' cleansing of the Temple, St. John writes, "His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." May it consume us as well!



Pr. David Ramirez is assistant pastor of Zion Lutheran Church-Lincoln, IL. He graduated from Concordia Theological Seminary-Fort Wayne in 2008. He stayed on for an additional year as a graduate assistant for the Historical Theology Department before being ordained in July of 2009. He is currently working on a Masters of Sacred Theology in historical theology. Pr. Ramirez is married to Lisa, and they have been blessed with four children thus far.

¹ Edward H. Schroeder, "Law-Gospel Reductionism in the History of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 43 (1972): 235.

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