June 26, 2015

Open Letter regarding Dr. Jim Stump and the Statement on Human Origins

Constituents of Bethel College:

Though curricula on Human Origins is a very small part of the college’s curriculum, the topic has become a prominent theological conversation for two years at Bethel and remains an important pedagogical point of clarification for evangelical Christian institutions of higher education. Trust and communication is significant to every college community, especially on sensitive developments. See below a joint statement by Jim Stump, Ph.D. — a veteran, valued, and popular professor of philosophy and leader of Bethel’s Honor’s Program -- and Gregg Chenoweth, Ph.D., president of Bethel College, which addresses Dr. Stump’s plan for alternate employment.

Statement from Jim Stump:

I fully respect the right of the Bethel Board of Trustees to determine policies for the College. The recent "Educational Philosophy Statement on Origins," adopted by the Board in June 2015, reflects the will of the broader community of which Bethel is a part. In considering this corporate commitment, I decided to resign from my position at Bethel in order to pursue alternate work, rather than remain under the new Statement and bring tension to the Bethel community.

While there are recent reports in national media describing the dismissal of faculty at religious institutions over Origins, it should be clear that I initiated my own resignation; I was never asked to resign from Bethel College. In fact, many Bethel leaders have been extraordinarily supportive of me throughout this lengthy process of arriving at the Statement.

Bethel has been an important part of my life, and remains an effective institution for its students and faculty. I hope that anyone who feels concern for me will not view support for me and the College as mutually exclusive. I’m thankful for my time here, but believe God now directs me to other ways of serving the Kingdom. I have goodwill for Bethel and pray for God's blessing on the institution.

Sincerely,

Jim Stump, Ph.D.
Department of Religion & Philosophy
Statement from President Chenoweth:

Jim’s influence on our campus is significant. Countless alumni and current students name Jim as one star in the constellation of their Bethel experience. I appreciate his professionalism and perspective in our many conversations throughout this complex process.

I also wish to affirm Bethel’s commitment to academic rigor within Christian context. While God certainly accepts and uses His people for great purposes regardless of their education, higher education intensifies the effectiveness of the gospel in people and across the world. God clearly uses Christian colleges for strategic purposes (Acts 19:8-10). So, we will continue to love the Lord with our mind (Matthew 22:37) and explore the wonderful mystery that all things are created by God, both invisible and visible, and remain held together in Christ (Colossians 1:17). As we implement this education ministry, we proceed in confidence that dispute is not the signpost of error. The fact is, Christian discipleship is sometimes a challenging process in taking every thought captive for Christ (II Corinthians 10:5). We seek the blessing of God which comes from unity (Ps. 133), but do not naively demand unanimity.

Looking into Fall 2015, one of Jim’s important contributions to our community has been leadership over the BUILD Honors Program. It will continue to be a robust academic landscape for students uniquely equipped for academic work. Barb Bellefeuille, Ed.D., vice president for academic services, now works with Jim and other faculty to determine an effective transition and to assign appropriate leadership for these students.

In the gift of grace,

[Signature]

Gregg Chenoweth, Ph.D.
President, Bethel College

P.S. If you wish to read our Statement on Origins, go to BethelCollege.edu/Believe, then click the Origins link.