



Holy Trinity Evangelical-Lutheran Church
of the
Unaltered Augsburg Confession

Rev. Eric J. Stefanski
Pastor

Sunday Bible Classes
9:00 am
Divine Service
10:30 am

Wednesday Prayer Offices
Matins, 10:00 am
Vespers, 6:30 pm

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To Whom It May Concern:

Almost from the moment I was ordained and became a member of the clergy roster of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, the doctrine that I swore to teach and defend has been officially repudiated by the synod. I was ordained in April of 1989; by July of that same year, the synod in convention adopted what has been called “the Wichita Recension of the Augsburg Confession.” The synod resolved, contrary to Augsburg Confession XIV, to allow those who have not been called and ordained to preach, teach, and administer the sacraments. At the time, I did not think of the resolution establishing this as reason to leave the LCMS, largely because I thought that it would be overturned in short order and allowed myself to be distracted by the removal of Dr. Robert Preus and by the needs of my own parishes and life.

Even after the eight years of ‘conservative’ synodical administration under President A.L. Barry, the LCMS did not right itself on this issue of ‘lay ministry’ . . . and, indeed, many other matters of doctrine and practice suffered further. From the evils of the Bohlmann-inspired ‘dispute resolution’ system adopted in 1992, to the overwhelming of the synod by advocates of non-liturgical worship, to the establishment of ‘open Communion’ as the ‘norm’ in most places (though masquerading as ‘close Communion’), what I *thought* we had all agreed to teach and confess at ordination has been less and less in evidence with each passing year, with no end in sight. Indeed, with the synod’s endorsement of ‘ecclesiastical supervisors’ who engage in and approve of gross unionism and syncretism, there seems little reason for any hope of recovery.

In short, the LCMS has negated her ‘paper orthodoxy’ and officially endorsed false teaching by tolerating and encouraging practices that contradict her ‘official doctrine’.

We see this in President Kieschnick’s reports to the synod, wherein he minimizes the false practice of ‘open communion’, pretending that there are simply some differences in the practical application of our synod’s professed position of “Closed Communion”—though he is also unable to bring himself to use the ‘d’ at the end of that word as Franz Pieper’s *Christliche*

Dogmatik does (volume 3, page 444).

Then again, President Kieschnick has also refused to discipline President David Benke for his communing in an ELCA congregation, even though the Commission on Constitutional Matters (which is usually slavishly obeyed) has said that those whose error is discovered are to publicly correct the error (CCM Opinion 03-2353). Of course, communing and communing with the heterodox are a subcategory of “unionism and syncretism,” and both presidents Benke and Kieschnick have a ‘history’ in this area. Kieschnick continues to maintain publicly that his approval of Benke’s participation in a unionistic and syncretistic prayer service at Yankee Stadium is not only correct, but the position of the LCMS. Unfortunately, 2004 convention resolution 3-06A makes this seem correct, since it officially approves of guidelines that include an allowance for ‘serial prayers’ of LCMS clergy with non-Christian clergy. So much for the LCMS constitution’s “Conditions for Membership” mandating the “renunciation of unionism and syncretism of every description.” If we wish to do something forbidden in the LCMS, we simply redefine it in a new document and say that we’re still the same old Missouri. “Be not deceived; God is not mocked” (Gal. 6:7); the First and Second Commandments, Romans 16:17, Isaiah 42:8, etc., still remain.

That ‘redefine and remain the same’ strategy has ‘worked well’ for the liberals in the LCMS with the issue of women’s service in the Church. First, the CTCR of the 1960s decided that a vote was not an exercise of authority, but of service, so that women could vote; now, with 2004 Resolution 3-08A, the offices of president and elder have been redefined so that there is no longer invested in these offices any accountability for the public functioning of the Office of the Ministry and, thus, they have become open to women. The synod has thereby rejected its historic adherence to “the order of creation,” by which it held that the Holy Spirit’s word through St. Paul in 1 Timothy 2, that a woman is not to have authority over men in the Church because of God’s designation of estates and order already at Creation.

Of course, this also leaves us with neither the president or elders having any accountability for the functioning of the pastoral office, nor the Voters’ Assembly having such, since women are still not allowed such ‘authority’. (I would think that women would be more than a little angry that the LCMS finally ‘allowed’ them to vote and to hold these offices only after they had neutered them.) Who, then, is left to have authority and to judge the shepherds, since it is hereby officially taken away from the sheep? Why, the “ecclesiastical supervisors,” of course! Supervisor = Overseer = Bishop; thus, the LCMS now has bishops—and not like the bishops of the Confessional Lutheran church bodies in Europe and Africa, but bishops in the worst sense of the word: ‘supervisors’ who have surreptitiously appropriated all authority to themselves.

This is clear in several areas. Beginning with the obvious, 2004 Resolution 8-01A removed the right of congregations and pastors to initiate formal synodical proceedings to ensure that each member of the synod confesses and practices in accord with the Word of God. The ability to initiate such proceedings now is solely at the discretion of the district presidents and synodical president.

Again, the granting of permission by an LCMS ‘bishop’ entirely indemnifies one from being held

accountable for his sinful words and actions. This was established by the Commission on Constitutional Matters (Opinion 02-2309) and, since the convention failed to remove their ruling, it is binding upon the synod; it is “the synod’s position.” Thus, the Word of God itself is made of no effect if the ecclesiastical supervisor has permitted something contrary to it.

This absolute authority of LCMS bishops is seen, too, in the CCM’s saying (Opinion 04-2387) that since the term “proper channels” is not defined in the LCMS Handbook, when the Handbook directs the district presidents to schedule visits to a congregation only through the “proper channels” that this should mean ‘whatever channels the district president considers appropriate’—even if he bypasses the elders/deacons, president, Church Council, pastor, and so on to meet with a minority and establish a conventicle that he will then favor and regard as ‘the church’ in opposition to the officers, Voters’ Assembly, regular worshipers, and so on.

Note that not a single LCMS district president has spoken out against these errors and abuses.

At the same time, LCMS district presidents now believe that they can tell a congregation and pastor that a Call has been “completed” and the pastor rendered in need of “a new divine call,” even though the congregation is satisfied that the pastor is still doing what God Called him to do.

The arrogant amassing of power is seen, too, in the establishment of pseudo-clergy training programs in their districts, in which they ‘license’ for the public ministry (Word and Sacrament) those who have not been trained and certified in the accepted way of our synod. Indeed, they bypass the synodical seminaries and the process of ‘filtering out’ those who are “not apt to teach” or otherwise not meeting the scriptural qualifications of the Office of the Ministry.

Such would be bad enough if it were only a power grab by the district presidents; unfortunately, this has been an error growing in acceptance in the LCMS—the error referenced earlier, the contradiction of Augsburg Confession XIV by having those “publicly preach, teach, and administer the Sacraments” who are *not* called and ordained. This error was officially sanctioned for the first time at the Wichita convention of the LCMS in 1989. 2001 Resolution 3-08 (which was endorsed by both of our seminaries) would have put an end to this aberration, but a substitute resolution, 3-08B, was passed, which instead endorsed and continued this practice. In the Mid-South District (in which I was serving in 2003), the 2003 district convention further endorsed this unlutheran and unscriptural (Romans 10) practice. With the passage of 2004 Resolution 5-09, the Convention directed “the Synod in convention recognize, affirm, and encourage the work of the Districts in developing ministry-equipping programs for laity.” Thus, the “Wichita Recension of the Augsburg Confession” as an institutional error of the LCMS has now become firmly-entrenched.

So many other things could be cited to show the departure of the LCMS from what I committed myself to at my ordination that this document could quickly become entirely unwieldy. The resolution of the 2004 convention that directed the synod’s Commission on Worship to develop “diverse worship” (2-04) while President Kieschnick promotes the worship of the revivalists, along with the approval of a hymnal with ‘contemporary worship’ songs in it, is a demonstration that Missouri is headed farther down the road away from its Constitution’s requirement of “exclusive use of doctrinally pure agenda, hymnbooks, and catechisms.” Missouri is, at best,

schizophrenic regarding worship, as is shown by the production of a hymnal and resources that both encourage historical liturgical renewal and the use of Twila Paris and Amy Grant songs... but, then, it is schizophrenic about so *many* things at this point that such is hardly noteworthy.

Such schizoid tendencies have become all the more clear to me in recent months as I've pondered the confession of genuine Lutheran teaching and practice *against* the synod I had intended to live and serve in for the rest of my earthly life against the backdrop of the abuse of power within that synod that is rivaled only by pre-Reformation Rome. The coercive force of the office of district president (or of his appointed 'investigator') highlights the doctrinal aberrations and grabs for power recounted above, as does the abuse of Scripture in their attempted brokering of 'reconciliation'.

There was a great outcry against those who filed their complaints against David Benke for his unionism and syncretism in 2001, that somehow they were violating Matthew 18, even though the record clearly shows that a) they were complaining about a *public* sin and b) they did seek to discuss the issue with President Benke first. On the other hand, there is no such outcry when district officials listen to accusations brought against a pastor by congregation members even though those members have never come to their pastor with their complaints, no outcry when the district officials take the word of an individual with whom they are friendly in spite of an entire Voters' Assembly testifying otherwise ('Good Ol' Boy-ism', also known as 'party spirit' in Lutheran circles), no complaint when the district officials bypass and supersede a congregation's Board of Deacons, Church Council, President, and pastor to secretly meet with dissidents and to establish an ongoing conventicle within the congregation. No, in such circumstances a district president will assert that he has the authority (indeed, an apostolic mandate, based upon Philippians 4:2!) to step in and broker 'peace' without regard for any preceding violations of Matthew 18—nor for his perpetuation of the same as 'necessary' to make Matthew 18 'work'. Indeed, in such a case both district officials and the assembled circuit pastors are free to gossip about the situation and draw up accusations not only against the pastor in question, but against the laity...with neither repercussion nor admonition for such a circuit to apologize to even the laity for the circuit's sins against them.

If a pastor refuses to allow such a mob to operate *as* a mob by giving any place to their rumor mongering, stupidly asserts that district officials must apologize for such actions before there can be any 'oneness', holds the flock entrusted to him in too high a regard to allow the impugning of their honor to stand, etc., that pastor will be said to have no interest in reconciliation, and 2 Corinthians 5:20 will be used against him with a claim that the Word of Reconciliation has not to do with being reconciled to God, but with being 'one' with impenitent sinners.

One would like to say that such a thing is simply an example of a few sinful men displaying a lack of integrity, but the fact is that such abuses are not only repeated in the LCMS, but *repeatable*; that is, these things can and will continue to be done because we operate under a broken system, a system the practical application of which is given to such abuses precisely because of the destruction of orthodox Lutheran theology by the very sort of resolutions cited above.

Like many others, I have spent my entire tenure in the ministry fighting for Missouri...fighting

to have the good theology and practice of historic Missouri be the theology and practice not only of the congregations I have served, but of the districts I have served. A lot of that time has been spent, too, in trying to make sure that the official doctrine of Missouri would remain Missouri's doctrine in practice... but it's been slipping away from the very beginning, and after the above-cited changes and abuse of power I do not think that it will be restored. Even while I am encouraged by the many contemplating official dissent under the Bylaws of the synod or the entering of a state of confession, it looks to be 'too little, too late'; too many pastors 'sparing' congregations from knowing what was going on in the synod for the past twenty-plus years has so weakened us that it seems very unlikely that there will be a truly informed deliberative body at an LCMS convention any time soon.

Let this not be construed as a discouragement of those who continue this fight; I will be cheering them on, helping in any way that I can, and praying that I am wrong and that the LCMS so repents that its former glory is finally seen as but a flickering prelude to the bright beacon of God's grace that she becomes. For me, however, the fight from within Missouri is now over. I cannot in good conscience allow my congregation to suffer the distraction of her pastor fighting to stay in Missouri while her members have no desire to be in fellowship with the pastors and district within which it geographically lies, because they have seen the theology and practice of those pastors and that district firsthand in various visits and have also suffered firsthand the abuse and accusations of the same.

The things mentioned in the preceding are not occasional errors that are in the process of being corrected (the "casual intrusion of error" mentioned by Pieper), but have become the actual doctrine of the LCMS, either by having been approved by our synod in convention or by being in widespread practice with a total lack of discipline. These are not 'picky' things, either; each, in its own way, undermines the saving Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and is therefore intolerable. Our congregation, therefore, has no desire to affiliate with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, and I see no reason to fight (most certainly a losing battle) through the LCMS's corrupt 'dispute resolution' system to remain attached to a body that my congregation quite reasonably rejects. It is for that reason—the now-endorsed and codified doctrinal aberrations and abuse of power—that I find it proper for me to leave the LCMS at this time, even though it grieves me to give up the fight for her restoration. I pray that Missouri's false sons may quickly fall and that her righteous may rise up and confess against these attacks on the Gospel, so that those I serve in Christ would see a way to return to Missouri that would honor Christ, but it will only be when Missouri returns to Missouri—that is when she returns to her original unqualified confession and practice—that we can again seek her fellowship.

By my signature, therefore, I indicate my withdrawal from the clergy roster of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod as of 2 April 2005, that I may continue the work for which the Lord of the Church has appointed me, proclaiming the Gospel of Christ in northern Arkansas.

In service to Christ and His Church,

Rev. Eric J. Stefanski