

An Explanation of our Continued Dissent against Six Identified Errors in the LCMS

Our Statement of Confession, written by me and adopted by you, is really a copying of work done by others. This was a mistake. The virtue of our statement is that it is the only one I know of that contains documentation of the errors. However, by titling it Statement of Confession and citing the 1970 CTCR's definition and acceptance of the term, I have repeatedly been asked about a time frame.

Statement of Confession is a term that everyone knows what it means but no one knows exactly where it came from. The CTCR in 1970 thought it came from Article X of the Formula of Concord. Dr. Albert Collver, at present an assistant to the president of the LCMS, made light, if not fun of, the concept in a 2005 Easter-tide issue of *Logia*. He said declaring oneself to be in a State of Confession is not an option for those who take the Lutheran Confessions seriously. I responded in an April 23, 2005 letter to the editor which *Logia* did not publish but which I did in an August 30, 2010 blog post of mine.

I don't think we should use the term Statement of Confession any longer as it ties us to a CTCR definition of the term that is over 40 years old, and it interjects a time frame where Scripture does not have one. It seems to me akin to taking Matthew 18 as "three strikes and you're out" rather than as a way to restore your brother. Also a time of confession lasts as long as the error does. While Formula of Concord Article X is about adiaphora a principle found there applies to our situation. "When a clear-cut confession of faith, is demanded of us, we dare not yield." I don't think I do this principle any injustice by leaving out the context, but I will quote it anyways. "We, believe, teach, and confess that in time of persecution, when a clear-cut confession of faith is demanded of us, we dare not yield to the enemies in such indifferent things, as the apostle Paul writes, 'For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery' (Gal. 5:11)." The next two passages cited by Formula X apply directly to our case: "Do not be mismatched with unbelievers, for what fellowship has light with darkness?" (II Cor. 6:14)." "To them we did not yield in submission even for a moment that the truth of the Gospel might be preserved for you' (Gal. 2:5)." We have taken our stand to show light does not have fellowship with darkness and have done so in order to preserve the truth of the Gospel for ourselves and others.

As I said in my 2007 letter to the CTCR, I continue to dissent against the following: 1) Synod's toleration of open Communion practices. 2) Synod's encouragement of diverse worship practices. 3) Synod's official acceptance of a document that says Christian and non-Christian clergymen may take turns praying at a "civic event." 4) Synod's acceptance of people preaching, teaching, or administering the Sacraments without a regular Call. 5) Synod's resolution that the order of creation only applies in the church in regard to the pastoral office. 6) Synod robbing sheep of their right to judge shepherds.

The impression that we haven't done anything since making the original confession in June 2005 is erroneous. In September 2005, I made a public confession of our Statement at a meeting of three circuits of Austin area churches. There were over 20 pastors present. On the basis of our confession the three circuits studied most of our points. The presenter was Dr. Ray Martens, retired president of Concordia University, Austin. His conclusions definitely leaned our direction.

We submitted resolutions to the 2006 District and the 2007 Synodical conventions. This is after submitting like resolutions to the 2003 District and 2004 Synodical conventions. I spoke before a 2004 Synodical floor committee and a 2006 District floor committee. I sought to get five of our members on Synodical boards and committees to take our confession in person to the synodical level. I asked my circuit counselor to have the district president appoint me to a 2006 District floor committee and I asked to be the pastoral delegate from our circuit to the 2007 Synodical convention. None of these were successful but all were tried. In 2006 I wrote an article on civil religion for *Logia* supporting our position against praying with pagans. It was entitled *Civil Righteousness versus Civil Religion* and was published in their 2006 Holy Trinity issue.

In February 2007 the CTCR responded to our dissent. I led a lengthy study in Bible class of their response. (Before entering into a state of confession, we had a 12 week study of the issues.) In August 2007, I responded to the CTCR's *Response to Dissent* with a 2000 word letter concluding that I still dissented. The congregation in a separate letter that same month wholeheartedly supported my response. Both letters, as well as our original statement of confession, were published in our newsletter and have always been available on our website for all to read.

In June 2008, at the end of the three year time limit that I had unwisely put in the original Statement of Confession, I placed before the congregation in a newsletter article the choices before them. (This article too has always been on the website for all to read.) Quoting from that newsletter article the choices were as follows: "1) Repeal their Statement of Confession and appeal to my ecclesiastical supervisors to discipline me based on what I have written above. 2) Continue to affirm their Statement of Confession. 3) Break fellowship with the LCMS thereby leaving the Synod." I also pointed out that if they resolved to stay in the Synod our Communion policy would have to be changed to recognize that there were members of the LCMS who publicly embraced false teachings that we are confessing against.

After two more years of preaching, teaching, and newsletter articles, in September 2010 we no longer automatically communed a person because they said they were a member of the LCMS. We started practicing fellowship by confession rather than fellowship by company or synod. It never has been true that by being a member of the LCMS we were automatically in fellowship with all in the LCMS. We were only in fellowship with those who accepted the confessional basis of the Synod found in Article II of the LCMS constitution. Those practicing open communion have always been outside that confession.

In this vein, it is very encouraging that the ACELC Board of Directors is bringing the following two resolutions to the 2014 ACELC conference. 1. To encourage the congregations of the ACELC and the Associate Members of the ACELC to seek out the true Marks of the Church when choosing to worship and receive the Lord's Supper within congregations of the LCMS. 2. To encourage pastors of ACELC congregations to exercise judgment and theological discernment when communing members of other LCMS congregations in order to retain the confessional integrity of the Lord's Supper. This is what we have been doing for over 3 years. These resolutions are particularly heartening since the impetus for them did not come from me or our lay delegate.

In March 2011 we joined the Association of Confessing Evangelical Lutheran Churches seeing them as a confessing movement, not a political one, in the LCMS. At this meeting the Second Vice-president of the LCMS, Rev. Wohlrabe, strongly chastised the founders of the ACELC for not following the dissent process. In the question and answer period after his presentation, I pointed out that Trinity had been following the dissent process since 2003 and have yet to come to a resolution. He said, "If you will send me all the documentation, I will look into it." I did, and he never has so much as acknowledged receiving it.

I fail to see how the Synod's unwillingness, inability, or slowness to answer us, puts us under obligation to operate in a certain time frame. As I pointed out in my newsletter article 5 years ago, while the Synod says I am bound by my vows to preach and teach publicly according to what Synod says in her doctrinal resolutions and statements, I consider these not binding if they are contrary to Scripture. Article VII. C. of our Constitution says "All matters of doctrine and conscience shall be decided only by the Word of God." Therefore what has not been resolved or stated according to the Word of God can't bind anyone. So I continue to preach and teach in accordance with our public confession.

As I alluded in the September Voters Assembly, these are extraordinary times along the lines of what Luther faced in Germany and Walther faced in America. The LCMS is by far the largest Lutheran synod in America that has any hope of being orthodox. Our Synodical leaders are sounder than they have been in the past, but they are no faster at disciplining error. Because

this is so, I continue to preach and teach the truth while remaining a member of the LCMS and protecting my flock by our Communion practice. There is the danger that by not separating completely, we do not show clearly that we are not in fellowship with LCMS errors. However, our public confession makes it plain that we are not. Those whose conscience bothers them for continuing to stay in the LCMS are free to join either the ELS or WELS churches in our area. Those who want to be in full Communion with all in the LCMS can join St. Paul who is in Communion with all who are members of the LCMS. Those who want open Communion can join any of the more than a dozen LCMS churches in our area that practice open Communion.

Rev. Paul R. Harris
Trinity Lutheran Church, Austin, Texas
November 5, 2013 A.D.

“Resolved that Trinity remain in the Missouri Synod practicing responsible admission to the Lord's Table for the sake of confessing the truth and preserving the Gospel in her midst and be it further resolved that An Explanation of our Continued Dissent against Six Identified Errors in the LCMS be regarded as a clarification of our position” (Trinity Lutheran Church, Voters Assembly, November 05, 2013 A.D.).