

A Confession of Faith prompted by the Dodoma Statement

Colleagues,

On April 29, 2010 the Lutheran bishops of Tanzania issued The Dodoma Statement, a critical response to the actions of other churches in worldwide Lutheranism with reference to homosexuality. [The URL for the full text of the Dodoma statement is <http://www.elct.org/news/2010.04.004.html>]

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Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

1. INTRODUCTION

1. We confess a Lutheran doctrine of justification—namely, that faith in the Gospel, God’s promise to forgive sinners on account of Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection alone and only, brings salvation.
2. We confess that it is this doctrine of justification that is the subject of the Augsburg Confession, the rest of the Book of Concord, and the works of many theologians, ranging from early church fathers to the present. With Luther, we confess that “...if this article stands, the Church stands; if it falls, the Church falls.”
3. All of these secondary sources derive their

understanding of justification from the Holy Bible, which in turn derives its authority solely as the cradle carrying Christ to the nations.

4. We confess along with Luther, the Lutheran Confessions and John 1 the inerrant Word of God. God's Word is specifically the Gospel promise, which became incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ. We confess that God's Word ("Wort Gottes" in Luther's writings and the Confessions) is Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, and not the Bible ("Bibel" or "Heilige Schrift" in the same literature). That is to say that the Bible is not the final word on just any matter, but rather witnesses to the Word of God that is forgiveness in Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, God's final Word on the problem of human sinfulness, nothing more, and nothing less.
5. Christian unity is the common confession of and trust in the Gospel most concretely exemplified in the common partaking of the Eucharist. As such, we confess along with Luther that Christian unity does not arise out of fellowship with one another or because people "have something to do with each other," but rather that Christian unity arises when we each individually place our trust entirely in God's Gospel promise alone.
6. We understand Christian unity to be articulated in the 7th article of the Augsburg Confession:

"The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered. And to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies,

instituted by men, should be everywhere alike."

Thus, since our Christian unity arises solely from our individual trust in the Gospel, we confess that it is not dependent on or subject to the social or legal institutions of any nation, state or country.

2. SEXUALITY AND THE GOSPEL

1. In 2009, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA hereafter) adopted the social statement "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust" and four changes to its ministry policies. The social statement describes four positions of faithfulness within the ELCA regarding publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous same-gender unions.
2. While there are fundamental differences in these four positions, we have witnessed faithful Christians described by each of these positions. Specifically, within the ELCA co-exist Christians who have different understandings of the content of God's Law, but are united in recognizing both that they are convicted by God's Law as sinners and freed by God's free Word of forgiveness in the Gospel.
3. That God's Law for marriage has been understood differently by different cultures is witnessed to both by the Bible, including Gen 28:9, Deut 25:5-10, Mark 10:8, 1 Tim 3:2, and by the different civil laws that have governed marriage in different countries and different times.
4. We confess that in spite of different cultural understandings, God's Law is yet eternal and unshaken because two vital functions of God's Law remain intact: each society is structured to preserve its people's welfare (God's law of

preservation), and we are accused of our failings and short-comings, including those pertaining to our abuse and misuse of God's good gift of sexuality (God's law as the sinner's accuser).

5. We confess that out of great love for us, Jesus Christ was given to die for us, and for His sake, God forgives us our sins. Our rebellion against God is ended with the cross, and new life in Christ begun with the resurrection, when we place our faith in God's saving grace.
6. As our Christian unity rests not in our old life ruled by God's Law, but in our new life freed by God's Gospel, different organizations of marriage, family, government, economics or labor do not threaten our shared Christian unity. We understand this to be articulated in the Defense of Article 7 of the Augsburg Confession: "Similarity of human rites, whether universal or particular, is not necessary, because the righteousness of faith is not a righteousness bound to certain traditions."
7. As shared faith in Christ crucified and risen for us alone and only, Christian unity is destroyed whenever other standards are raised in addition to or in place of Christ. This includes requiring any particular stance on subjects within marriage, family, economics, or government. We confess that it is the placement of other standards for unity and other requirements for salvation in addition to or instead of Christ crucified and risen for us that is the source of discord within the church.
8. In discussion over human sexuality, we confess that we all have set up our perceived "moral right" as a standard in addition to Christ's death and resurrection. This has destroyed unity both within

our denomination and in the world-wide church. We confess that our disunity is rebellion against God, and is a lonely death sentence for each of us.

3. IN CONCLUSION

1. We confess that out of great love, Jesus Christ died for us, alone and forsaken on the cross ("My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt 27:46)). We confess that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead into new life, and raises us out of lonely death to new life united in Christ.
2. We confess that it is thusly that we are joined together in Christ, and not out of what we have done, or which moral standards we have adopted. We confess that along with the old Adam or old Eve within us, God has put to death all of our iniquities, failures and rebellions. The new creation God makes within us is free of sin, death and the devil.
3. We confess that our new life in Christ is not a continuation of the old life, but an entirely new creation for which the Law is no longer necessary. The "newest" element in that new life/new creation is the new FAITH, the heart that now hangs on Christ in place of any and all other alternatives. That new faith makes Christ the ethical guide for our lives, not God's Law—as good and holy as God's Law indeed is. Yet until God kills the old creation within us, however, we live in tension between old and new creations.
4. As a confessional Lutheran church, the ELCA is called to proclaim to all nations the good news that new creation through Jesus Christ is God's solution to our sin. We give thanks for all of our partners in this mission that God has given us. Trusting in

God's resurrection promise, we do not fear to proclaim the Gospel, even in places where civil, religious or other institutions will bring us physical, psychological or emotional harm.

5. We recognize that it is left up to each church body to choose their ministers. We confess that the ELCA trusts, permits and calls all of our ministers, regardless of whether or not they are in or support same-gendered relationships, to proclaim the Gospel and rightly administer the Sacraments.

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