

Introduction to "The Common Confession"

The Historical and Theological Rationale for this Statement of Faith

October 19, 2005 - Rev. Steven E. King

"As for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." (2 Timothy 3:14-15)

Throughout the history of the Church, each new generation of God's people has been called to "hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering" trusting that "he who has promised is faithful." (Hebrews 10:23)

In the early centuries of the Christian era, when many heresies threatened to undermine the Gospel and distort the teaching of Scripture, faithful people drew up the Ecumenical Creeds, to teach the basics of the Christian faith, to warn against false belief, and to provide a common confession by which faithful Christians could speak of their faith together. Likewise, in the Middle Ages, when the gospel of Christ had become obscured by the human traditions of the Church, reformers wrote new confessions to address the challenges confronting the biblical message in their own time. Documents such as the Augsburg Confession and the Formula of Concord did not seek to invent new doctrine, but were an attempt by the reformers to remove obstacles that had been placed before the Word. All of these historical confessions are still used to this day, that we as believers may "continue in what we have learned and firmly believed", in a testimony that is consistent with those who have gone before us in faith.

In our own day, the Gospel of Jesus Christ faces new obstacles and distortions. As Paul warned, there is always the risk that the Church may be "deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel — not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ." (Galatians 1:6-7).

To address the doctrinal issues at stake for those of us in the American Lutheran tradition today, many individuals and reform movements have attempted to outline the biblical teachings we have inherited, as it relates to our own context. Various statements and confessions have been drawn up, to which many have subscribed. One of the more broad-based statements has been the "Ten Affirmations of the WordAlone Network", a summary of beliefs that have helped to guide the network. Another is the "Dorado Covenant", a statement of principles offered in support of biblical and evangelical proclamation, supported by congregations and individuals.

Along with the constitutional "Confession of Faith" of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, these statements formed the basis for the text of the Common Confession, a document written in 2005 for distribution among Lutheran churches in North America. This confession was not a presentation of any new doctrine, nor was it intended to replace the historical confessions that came before it. In addition, though it is based on the teachings of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, it was not written to serve as a comprehensive summary of Christian doctrine. Rather, it was meant to address the particular theological concerns facing Lutherans in the 21st Century.

Additional background information can be found on the Lutheran CORE website: www.lutherancore.org