

Welcome and Introduction

ACELC Free Conference
Christ For Us: The Order of Creation
Rev. Clint K. Poppe 8/29/17

It is my great honor and privilege to welcome you to the Seventh Annual Free Conference of The Association of Confessing Evangelical Lutheran Congregations (ACELC), Christ For Us: The Order of Creation. At our first Free Conference (Kearney, Missouri, 2011), before the ACELC was officially formed, we introduced a list of ten errors that we had identified as being tolerated, supported, or promoted in the LCMS. Since that time we have devoted each of our Free Conferences to a single topic from that list. In 2012 the topic was Holy Communion, in 2013 the topic was Worship, in 2014 the topic was The Office of the Holy Ministry, in 2015 the topic was The Unbiblical Removal of Pastors from their Calls and last year the topic was The Dispute Resolution Process. We pray that our efforts have been a blessing for the Church with the goal of uniting us in doctrine and practice.

This year's topic, The Order of Creation, seems to be very timely. While Matthew Becker is no longer on the clergy roster of the LCMS¹, our church body has no shortage of confusion and disunity on the subject. Practice varies widely among us, while many of our leaders claim that we are completely united in doctrine. Many "Different Voices" continue to offer a "Shared Vision" for "full ministry" for women in the LCMS, including but not limited to women's ordination. Groups such as "Ordain Women Now," and "Daystar" have and continue to promote a radical agenda of feminism and gospel reductionism. Many District Presidents have either turned a deaf ear to the concern or quietly tolerated and/or promoted the aberrant teaching. Thankfully, at the 2016 LCMS convention in Milwaukee, Resolution 5-14 was passed. "To Reaffirm Biblical Teaching on Man and Woman in the Church" is precisely why this conference topic was chosen; we are happy to follow the directives of this resolution and help contribute to sound biblical teaching among us with the goal of unity in doctrine and practice in our beloved synod.

The congregations of the ACELC entered into formal dissent with the LCMS on this topic way back in August of 2011, specifically with regard to 2004 Synodical Resolution 3-08A, "To Affirm the Conclusions of the 1994 CTCR Report: The Service of Women in Congregational and Synodical Offices." We were told at that time that our correspondence with the CTCR would be shared with the Executive Committee at the next meeting in September of 2011. We heard nothing until a letter dated Feb. 2, 2012 stating that the CTCR committee that was discussing our dissent had some questions. After several attempts to find out what these questions were, I received an email from CTCR Executive Director Dr. Joel D. Lehenbauer on March 19 asking "for a 30 minute (or so) conversation." That conversation happened on April 3, Holy Tuesday. On behalf of the ACELC I shared our concern that the second "resolved" in Resolution 3-08A is rather ambiguous and some in the LCMS have taken this as "pretty much everything goes." His concern was that our dissent had included several issues that were not directly connected to Resolution 3-08A and wanted to narrow down our specific concerns. I was very clear that it would be most helpful for the church if the CTCR would look at the bigger picture of the service of women in the church, if not with this particular dissent, then in the near future. I also stated that quoting Scripture and Confessions was more helpful than quoting previous CTCR documents and CCM opinions. Dr. Lehenbauer agreed on all counts. Our conversation was cordial and fraternal and overall quite pleasant. I was under the impression that we would be hearing from Committee 2 in the very near future.

¹ "Through an ecclesiastical technicality the Rev. Dr. Matthew Becker has been expelled from the clergy roster of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. Yet everyone knows that President Harrison and the most conservative members of the Synod have wanted him out because Dr. Becker wanted an open discussion on the subject of creation and women's ordination." The Daystar Journal, "A Call for Discussion," August 19, 2015. Signed by over 100 individuals, most of which are in the LCMS.

After 10 months of waiting, I asked for and was granted a personal meeting with Dr. Lehenbauer. I flew to St. Louis at the end of January, 2013, and was granted about 30 minutes. I was told that he was sorry that things had drug out so long, but Committee 2 wanted to take our dissent as an opportunity to address the issue in a broader way. He stated that all he needed to do was type up a final copy of the CTCR response to us and that I would be “mostly pleased.” A few weeks later the response arrived and suffice it to say that I was not “mostly pleased.” We were not given a formal response by the CTCR, which means they had no intention to make it public on their website or in the Convention Workbook. We were asked to hold our dissent “in abeyance” and to be patient while the Koinonia Project worked things out in synod and we were encouraged “to participate in wider synodical discussions of this issue.”

The member congregations of the ACELC were not “mostly pleased” either. The Board of Directors was strongly encouraged to submit another dissent. We read the CTCR response very carefully, tightened up our language and shortened our second dissent considerably. The ACELC “Dissent Women Redux” was completed on January 27, 2014 and submitted to the CTCR. We heard nothing. In April of that year I crossed paths with LCMS President Harrison at Call Day services in Ft. Wayne. I asked him if he knew anything about our dissent. He personally thanked me for the ACELC taking the time to send in another dissent on the topic. He assured me that the CTCR was taking our dissent seriously and that he had “inside information” that our dissent would be used as a springboard to address many areas of concern regarding the service of women in the church and that the matter would be handled “with alacrity.” I did not want to appear overly stupid in the presence of the Synodical President, so rather than ask him what the word “alacrity” meant, I looked it up on my phone when no one else was looking; “brisk eagerness and excitement.” I was very encouraged.

Perhaps that word has changed meaning over the years and no one bothered to tell dictionary.com. Perhaps the synodical president’s “inside information” was flawed. Perhaps the topic or even dealing directly and publicly with the ACELC was too much of a political landmine. Whatever the reason, the ACELC finally received word that the CTCR had taken up our second dissent, on December 10-12, 2015 (23 months after the second dissent had been submitted and 51 months after our original dissent was submitted). Their response was once again in a “non-formal” manner, and while not confidential, the CTCR had no intention of making it available on their website or in the Convention Workbook. We were directed to the CTCR’s document, requested by the synodical president, asking for clarifications to the 2005 Task Force Guidelines which followed the adoption of 2004 Synodical Resolution 3-08A.² The CTCR response to us is very short, just over two pages, and can be read on the ACELC web site. In reality, it is little more than a cut and paste document. We were once again asked to hold our dissent “in abeyance” and “to participate in wider synodical discussions of this issue.”

It is interesting that much of what was said in the CTCR non-formal response to us is directly related to the topic before this conference. Note this quote:

The Guidelines (like 2004 Res. 3-08A and the CTCR’s 1994 report) do not directly or explicitly address the issue of the “order of creation” and its relevance for issues relating to the service of women in the church. This was and is a major concern of those who have expressed dissent from 2004 Res. 3-08A, and needs continued careful study and attention (a task to which the CTCR has explicitly committed itself).

And this one:

Finally, it should be noted that while the Commission affirms that “the order of creation is clearly taught in Scripture,” and while it acknowledges that questions about the understanding and implications of this issue have not been sufficiently addressed and articulated, it also recognizes that questions about exactly “how to apply” the order of creation to specific questions of practice

² Note the date of this document, December 12, 2014:

file:///C:/Users/PASTOR~1/AppData/Local/Temp/LCMS-CTCR-Review-of-2005-Guidelines-Regarding-Service-of-Women-12-2014.pdf

and polity (beyond its application to the pastoral office and its distinctive functions) are very difficult to address with complete certainty, clarity, and consensus on the basis of Scripture alone. In other words, the Bible does not spell out explicitly “where to draw the line(s)” when it comes to exactly how the Biblical principle of the order of creation applies to all matters of congregational polity and practice. Hence the need for continued careful study and discussion of this matter (and patience, charity, and restraint where there is disagreement about these very difficult questions of application), to which the Commission itself is strongly committed as is indicated above.

As I pondered over the CTCR response/non response to the ACELC and the larger CTCR Document from which it was taken, I was compelled to make some basic conclusions. First, the CTCR heartily acknowledges the “clearly taught” biblical teaching of the Order of Creation, but nowhere defines or explains it. Second, the Bible does not tell us “exactly” “how to apply” the Order of Creation in “all matters” “of practice and polity,” except of course with regard to “its application to the pastoral office and its distinctive functions,” where there is obviously no debate or concern. Third, this topic is “very difficult to address” and although the LCMS talks big with regard to *sola Scriptura*, this is one area where, since “the Bible does not spell out” every conceivable detail “explicitly,” there is no way that we can have “complete certainty, clarity, and consensus on the basis of Scripture alone.” Finally, this whole matter is very emotional and not everyone agrees so we need more time to talk and discuss and bond and share and unite as one, and in the meantime, “women may serve in humanly established offices in the church as long as the functions of these offices do not make them eligible to carry out ‘official functions [that] would involve public accountability for the function of the public office.’” We don’t have to look very far to see how this LCMS version of “don’t ask; don’t tell” with a goal of “it’s too confusing and impossible for me to be sure” and the result of “since the matter is unsettled I can’t discipline and you can’t complain” is working itself out in our midst. Well at least the synod in convention passed 2016 Resolution 5-14...

I can see, based on this brief experience, why there is so much apathy and indifference among us. Honest and sincere efforts to have a meaningful discussion on the topics that divide us, are often dismissed as political maneuvering and met with more than a bit of skepticism. Many pastors, rather than entering the fray and contending for the faith, knowing that they are just one bad Voter’s Assembly away from the unemployment line, hunker down and try to walk the impossible line between being faithful and never giving offence. I can even sympathize with those who look at the current state of our synod, our synodical double talk and our all too often duplicitous elected officials, and losing all hope for repentance and change in the LCMS either call for the forming of a new synod or leave for hopefully greener pastures. I can sympathize with them but I will not join them, and in spite of vicious attacks from within and without, the ACELC has proven time and again that it will not join them. Why? Because the Word of God is not bound! And remember, *always remember*, where the Word of God is unleashed in full force, there is always hope!

That is why we are gathering here these two days. Not to bemoan the seeming inadequacy, uncertainty, and lack of clarity of the Holy Scriptures; heaven forbid! But rather to let the inspired, inerrant, infallible Word of God have its way with us. We are not afraid to let God, through His Word, drive us to our knees in repentance, and we are not so proud as think that we have better Words than God does. We are not too ashamed to let God unite us in doctrine and practice, even if that means pointing out error in current or past traditions and resolutions. May God grant us the courage not to be swayed by church or national politics and the winds of an increasingly evil culture. Here I stand, I can do no other; God help us. Amen.³

³ I have attached as an Appendix to this brief introduction an article by D. A. Carson, “Subtle Ways to Abandon the Authority of Scripture in our Lives,” *Themelios*, 42.1 (2017): 1-12. I believe it to be worthy of our time and attention. <http://tgc-documents.s3.amazonaws.com/themelios/Themelios-42-1.pdf#page=0>