

# The Odense Declaration

*The Odense Declaration is a warranty document for Danish “Evangelisk Luthersk Netværk” (English: Evangelical Lutheran Network – ELN). It is a contemporary statement of what has already been said in Scripture and the creeds of the church. The declaration was designed and presented when ELN was established in August 2006.*

The background for this document is our strong experience in the current situation of a need for our church and people to express and clarify what true Biblical, Lutheran faith is.

At a basic level, everything has been stated in the Bible, in the Ancient Creeds, and in the Lutheran confession. But many times through the history of the church, there has been a need for a fresh expression or clarification of the church’s basic beliefs; a clarification that has also included a clear rejection of current heresy and detours in the church scenery. This is how we experience the current situation in the Danish church. We need a clear and contemporary expression of our faith and confession. We cannot remain silent when we experience that what we see as elementary and vital truths are being suppressed, distorted, and neglected.

The following is not, of course, an exhaustive list of what can be said about the beliefs of the church. However, it expresses what we think needs to be said at this time.

## THE FAITH OF THE CHURCH IS

### **Belief in God**

God is eternal and unchanging. God is creator, sustainer, and Lord. God is personal. God is a living, acting I who meets us in history and in our lives.

Therefore God is not a result of our consciousness of the divine. God is independent of our beliefs and existence. “I believe in God and God ain’t me”. Thus, neither is God just a word for something that exists or happens between us – like love.

The goal of the ministry of the church is among other things a simple-minded trust and belief in God as a concrete and living reality.

### **Belief that God speaks to us**

The history of creation speaks to us about God. In the Bible, God speaks to us in plain words – with Jesus Christ as the climax and center. Therefore, Scripture is the revelation of God’s word and will. Thus, the Bible is the only absolute authority in everything regarding Christian belief, doctrine, and ethics.

This means that the Bible not only includes the word of God – it is the word of God. The center of the Bible cannot be played off against clear, single words and expressions read in their contextual meaning. Likewise, the Holy Spirit never guides to new “truths” that contradict the Bible.

Neither do we know any other Christ than the Biblical Christ.

### **Belief in Jesus Christ**

Jesus Christ is the Son of God and one with God. He became a man, born of the Virgin Mary. He died under the wrath of God in the place of sinful man. He rose physically from the grave and ascended to heaven where he sits at the right hand of God as Lord of the universe. He will return in glory as savior and judge of mankind. Jesus is the only hope of salvation and eternal life for the world and for us.

Therefore, the Biblical message about Jesus Christ must be understood in its plain and straightforward meaning. This is also true when the Biblical message contradicts the experiences and

worldviews of modern individuals. The message about Jesus Christ must be communicated in an understandable and current way to modern individuals, but the demand to adapt the straightforward meaning of the Biblical message to shifting eras' tastes and degrees of "enlightenment" is a rejection of Jesus Christ himself.

Consequentially, Jesus was more than just a man that loved God and his neighbor in an exceptional way. He not only showed what God is like. He was and is fully God as well as human.

### **Belief in the Holy Spirit**

The Spirit calls us to repentance and belief in Jesus Christ and lives in us by faith. The Spirit creates and nourishes faith in us. He equips us for ministry and mission. This is done primarily through the Word and the sacraments in the Christian congregation.

Therefore, Christian belief is more than psychology, training, and cultural or national background. A Christian congregation is more than a fellowship of opinion. Faith is personal but never private. Christian faith must be lived out in the Christian congregation, nourished through the means of grace, and lead to multifaceted ministry to one's neighbor and testimony to the world.

### **Obedience to God's will**

Believing in Jesus Christ is also following Jesus Christ in obedience to God's will. We are saved by faith alone, but faith never stands alone. It is effective in deeds of love and obedience.

The Christian church is a community of the failing and the weak who are aware that they can never live up to God's requirements and commandments. But the gospel of the forgiveness of sins also contains the gospel of living a holy life.

Therefore the gospel of justification by faith alone does not repeal the call to follow Jesus. The gospel of the forgiveness of sins does not set aside obedience. The fact that we are all sinners, and as such subject to judgment, does not mean that we all are subject to grace. Without repentance and faith, disobedience against God's will leads to eternal damnation.

### **Love of God and our neighbor**

God's love for us finds its response in our love of God and of our neighbor as it is expressed in the Great Commandment. The Great Commandment is demonstrated in Jesus' teachings and in the apostolic writings, which are binding, ethical guidance for the church at all times.

Therefore the Christian congregation must be characterized by forgiveness and care especially for the outcast, the despised, and those who are unsuccessful in their own or others' eyes. This also means that the Great Commandment cannot be played off against the concrete guidance of Jesus and the apostles so that Christian ethics should only be determined by a general commandment of love adapted to the situation and a subjective sense of right and wrong. The fundamental and specific Biblical ethics must not be readjusted by the era's shifting perception of morals. When a society continues to pass new laws with consequences for ethics and faith-related areas the church is not obliged to follow. So when a society is organized with other forms of partnership than lifelong marriage between man and woman, the true church will not follow. Using the name of God to sanction actions that contradict the Biblical specifications on what love is, is abuse of and an attack against the identity of the church as a Christian church.

### **Confession**

We confess our responsibility for the apostasy of our church and people. We confess our lack of faith, obedience, and love.

We confess our dependence upon the promise of Jesus Christ that the gates of Hell will never overcome his church.

We confess our faith in God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, creator, savior, and giver of life, one true, triune God, extoled from the first beginning, now and forever.