

A clear Lutheran voice from Germany

Dr. Johannes Friedrich, the new Presiding Bishop of the largest Lutheran church in the world, the United Evangelical Lutheran church of Germany (VELKD), recently addressed what it means to be Lutheran today.¹ Four points:

1. “The core of scripture, in Christian thinking, is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That means that all witnesses of the Old and New Testaments point to God’s salvation of humanity in Jesus Christ. They possess no importance outside of promoting Christ... At the same time [this understanding] rejects all extreme and narrow forms of biblical interpretation such as fundamentalism, enthusiasm, or shortsighted individual teachings.”

Comment: Therefore in its use of scripture the church is neither lost in historical relativism nor subject to the tyranny of particular agendas.

2. “The central proclamation of the church is that [Christ] reveals himself in the congregation gathered in his name, in the preaching of the Word and the celebration of the sacraments. So understood, we Lutherans stand in apostolic succession....This understanding of church subordinates all structural models and all forms of service to the working of Jesus Christ; it supersedes them, makes them changeable and renewable.”

Comment: Therefore no particular structure may be required, neither the papacy, nor the historic episcopate, nor congregationalism.

3. “The importance of the Lutheran emphasis on our being sent into the world: recognizing the two ways in which God rules, the so-called Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms....political power was not to put limitations on freedom of faith and conscience, and the church was not to view politics as its appendage, but rather groom Christians to be good citizens, engaged for the common good with Christian responsibilities.”

Comment: The church may not fall into the trap of claiming to be the “public church,” a term that conveys the idea that politics are an appendage to the church’s mission.

4. “... [P]roductive ecumenismfollows from a common understanding of the Gospel.”

Comment: As Friedrich points out, this is what has happened in Europe and the Third World where churches have grown together using the Leuenberg Agreement.

As we and others work to build a centrist Lutheran future in the USA, Presiding Bishop Friedrich’s clear voice gives hope that we are not alone.²

¹ Emphasis added. The full text of Dr. Friedrich’s address, which was given after he was elected Presiding Bishop of the VELKD at its October 15-19, 2005, Assembly, is available <https://crossalone.us/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Bishop-Friedrichs-address.pdf>. The VELKD has 10,650,000 members.

² See “[Charter of Freedom](#),” which sets forth the same basic Lutheranism Bishop Friedrich sets forth.