

Solid Ground Ministry/Canada
“The Failure of Dissent and New Beginnings”
September 21, 2011

Pastor Tim Johnson Presentation

The first presentation will be by the **Rev. Tim Johnson**, pastor of Grace Lutheran Church, Dawson Creek, BC.

Good morning. I’m Pastor Tim Johnson, presently serving Grace Lutheran Church in Dawson Creek, BC. I have the task of addressing some interesting topics and hope I can do them justice and be of some use to you personally and in your parishes

I am a “son of the church”, a pastor’s kid, born in Saskatoon the year my Dad graduated. Dad was married already, a “mature student”. This was after the war and he was shoe-horned into Seminary without a University degree. He served 34 years in six parishes, on national Pension boards, and then for Canadian Missions up the Sunshine Coast in BC part-time after retirement. Mom served joyously in LCW and then the new ELW. I went to college at CLC and graduated from the University of Alberta. I was at LTS in the 70s, ordained in 1978, and have served in Viking, AB, Lanigan, SK, Langley, BC and now in Dawson Creek, BC. I was elected to the Division for Theological Education and Leadership (DTEL) at merger in 1985 and served there and then on the Saskatchewan Synod Examining Committee before moving to BC in 1988. Some of the most delightful times in BC have been with the synod’s Confirmation Camp and I have been consultant to the synod for constitutional matters. My parents shared with me their love and loyalty for Christ, for the Scriptures, and for the church. It is that loyalty that now, regretfully, compels me to consider stepping aside from the ELCIC which I believe has abandoned that foundation of the Scriptures.

I was a delegate to the 2011 ELCIC Convention in Saskatoon. I met with Peeter Vanker, Bart Eriksson and some others on Thursday evening and after the crucial votes I spoke with him and others about a follow-up event like this. I have been a member of Solid Ground since 2007 although in a quieter role before this. I have resisted within the ELCIC for many years, sometimes publicly but other times privately – some of which I now want to share publicly with you. I was humbled when Peeter asked if I could take part in this event. There are many of you who have also worked strenuously in this resistance and would also have many things to share. I have to confess I also agreed quickly and readily. Garrison Keillor has a wonderful line in the sketch, “Basketball” when he was invited to record a short TV segment for CBS to precede an NCAA playoff game. [He would stand on the court and talk (holding a ball) for about two minutes and a half about the fun of the game, and then turn and take a jump shot.] “I didn’t ask why.” Keillor said, “I’m forty-five and I no longer worry about the motives of people who invite me to do something I want to do.” Well, I really want to do this! . . . and share the effective reasons for leaving the ELCIC.

Here’s my assignment this morning:

Presentation will include:

The first presentation will be by the **Rev. Tim Johnson**, pastor of Grace Lutheran Church, Dawson Creek, BC. His presentation will include:

- * Brief critique of the convention decisions
- * Prerequisites for institutional church unity
- * A reaffirmation of the ultimate authority of the Scriptures for faith and life
- * A renewed emphasis on evangelism and world missions

The Brief Critique or review of the convention is a natural starting place. My strongest interest has been on the nature of church unity and the authority of scripture. The fourth topic is not one I was expecting although it, too, is a natural extension of the nature of the church.

Convention Decisions

It is the Statement itself that makes profound changes. As in the ELCA in 2009, once the Statement passed, the motions that followed fell into place, both as natural outcomes of the Statement . . . and also because, “If you have the votes to pass the Statement, you have the votes to pass the motions.” The language that makes those changes is actually very short, and almost hidden because of the abundance of positive, affirming statements.

MARRIAGE

This church affirms marriage as a covenant of fidelity—a public, lifelong commitment between two people in a personal and sexual union. God, the source of all love, is active in marriage, offering encouragement, forgiveness, healing and blessing. The two spouses bear the primary responsibility for living out their vows and in recognizing God’s activity in their relationship. The church’s supportive role is expressed through community, prayer, worship and pastoral care.

(ELCIC Social Statement on Human Sexuality, Jan. 26, 2011 version, page 7)

I have given the whole first paragraph under the heading, “Marriage” [in the middle section of the Statement, “Facing God and Being Church”] but the effective change in understanding of marriage is in the first sentence. The church you belong to, or did belong to, the ELCIC, no longer believes that marriage is exclusively between one man and one woman. The rest of that section goes on to acknowledge the traditional understanding of marriage but then places both on an equal footing and ends by saying, “At this moment in time, this church is being called in the spirit of St. Paul (Galatians 2) to respect and to allow space for varied understanding and practices.” (Statement, p. 8) The only way to allow varied understanding and practices, of course, is to adopt this non-gendered definition of marriage.

The language of the Statement related to blessing same sex marriages and the ordaining and rostering of clergy is even more obscure. It occurs in the third section, “Doing Ministry”, under the heading

“Recognize Orientation”, (p. 13)

RECOGNIZE ORIENTATION

Our church recognizes that it is affected by the biases of our predominantly heterosexual culture, and by our society’s call for more openness.

This church encourages congregations and synods to engage in practices that more fully enable all people, regardless of their sexual orientation, to live as members of the body of Christ and as co-workers in ministry, and to help nurture disciples in the “image of God.”

ELCIC Social Statement on Human Sexuality, Jan. 26, 2011 version, p. 13

The words, “This church encourages congregations and synods to engage in practices that more fully enable all people, regardless of their sexual orientation, to live as members of the body of Christ . . .” are what establishes the local and synodical options for blessing same sex marriages . . .

“This church encourages congregations and synods to **engage in practices that more fully enable all people, regardless of their sexual orientation, to live as members of the body of Christ . . .**

= *authorizes blessing of same sex marriage as such a “practice” for both congregations and synods*

= *“local option” and “synodical option”*

and the phrase, “. . . and as co-workers in ministry, “ establishes ordination and rostering.

“This church encourages congregations and synods to engage in practices that more fully enable all people, regardless of their sexual orientation, to live as members of the body of Christ, **and as co-workers in ministry, . . .**

= *authorizes the rostering and ordaining / consecrating of clergy*

If the language of the Statement seems a bit thin to support such conclusions I will offer these two clarifications:

- * Bishop Gerhard Preibisch
Peace River & Northwest BC Conferences Convention,
Our Saviour's Lutheran Church, Prince George, BC, June 4-6, 2010
- * Bishop Greg Mohr
Peace River Conference Convention
Hope Trinity Church (Shared Ministry), Mackenzie, BC, June 10-11, 2011

- ☞ At our Peace River and Northwest Conferences Convention in Prince George, BC, in June 2010 in a business session of the Convention devoted to discussion of the First Draft, I asked Bishop Gerhard Preibisch if these words (actually the words of the First Draft that were similar -- but not identical) meant the local option for congregations and he replied unequivocally that that is exactly what they meant.
- ☞ A year later, in June 2011, now at the Peace River Conference Convention (alone) in Mackenzie, BC, I projected these words and pointed out what they meant. Our new bishop, Greg Mohr, agreed that the words meant blessing of marriages and ordaining and rostering of clergy – but added that those specific actions were supported throughout by the Statement taken as a whole.

Finally, the National Church Council and its Faith, Order and Doctrine Committee left us in no doubt about the specific consequences of the Statement with their motions about these two specific issues:

Faith, Order and Doctrine Committee: Three Motions (from the April 3, 2011 letter from NCC that accompanied the Final Draft, Page 3)

2. Motion on Presiding at or Blessing Marriages

(became in the Bulletin of Reports, p. F-100, and at the Convention . . .)

MOTION #27

That the 2011 ELCIC National Convention consider for approval the following policy statement:

It is the policy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada that rostered ministers may, according to the dictates of their consciences as informed by the Gospel, the Scriptures, the Ecumenical Creeds and the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, preside at or bless legal marriages according to the laws of the province within which they serve. All rostered ministers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada are encouraged to exercise due diligence in preparing couples for marriage. All rostered ministers serving congregations are encouraged at all times to conduct their ministry in consultation with the lay leaders in the congregation and with sensitivity to the culture within which the congregation serves.

Faith, Order and Doctrine Committee: Three Motions (from the April 3, 2011 letter from NCC that accompanied the Final Draft, Page 3)

3. Motion on Standards for Ordination and Consecration

(became in the Bulletin of Reports, p. F-100, and at the Convention . . .)

MOTION #28

That the 2011 ELCIC National Convention rescind Convention actions NC-1993-16 and NC-1989-96 and that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada consider for approval the following policy:

It is the policy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada that sexual orientation is not in itself a factor which disqualifies a candidate for rostered ministry or a rostered minister seeking a call. Candidates and rostered ministers are in all cases expected to adhere to the qualifications and standards as set out in the constitution and bylaws of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and of the synod within which they serve. Synods and congregations are expected to evaluate candidates for ordination or consecration and rostered ministers for call in accordance with a conscience informed by the Gospel, the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.

For purposes of clarity, then, there was no doubt about what the adoption of this Social Statement on Human Sexuality would mean and we can be grateful for that.

Here are the results of the voting:

Here are the results of voting on the Statement and on two of the three motions: *(I hope to return to the Motion on Unity later)*

On the Social Statement on Human Sexuality:

213 In Favour	134 Opposed	61.4%	vs.	38.6%
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On Motion #27, Presiding at or Blessing Marriages / Same-Sex Blessings

192 In Favour	132 Opposed	59.3%	vs.	40.7%
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On Motion #28, Standards for Ordination and Consecration / Rostered Ministry

205 In Favour	114 Opposed	64.3%	vs.	35.7%
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Are you wondering if the passage of the Statement and motions truly affects you as a congregation? Well, we need to remember that we are bound together by this section in the Model Constitution for Congregations:

(from the Approved Model Constitution for Congregations, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, Last amended 2010)

Article VI

Relationship to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC)

...

Section 2. This congregation claims for itself all the rights and privileges and accepts all the duties and obligations connected with being part of the ELCIC. In so doing this congregation recognizes the constitution, bylaws and enactments of this church and of the synod as having governing force in its life.

So, this Statement is our Statement and it has “governing force” in our life.

Adiaphora and Why It Matters

Picture of Highway

This is just outside Beaverlodge, AB, where they are twinning the highway – for which we are certainly grateful!

Hwy & house off foundation

To do that, there was a house that was too close to the new highway and needed to be moved. So on my drive home from the Convention I was driving by and thought this looked just like I felt – that we had lifted the church off its foundation.

Closer view of house & foundation with orange fencing

The Church – the ELCIC – was now supposed to look just like it was – same walls, same rooms, same furniture (*oops, here my parable is messed up a bit by Structural Renewal*) – but essentially we are all supposed to stay and we’ll be the “same church” we were before. But for me we have lifted up and moved off the foundation of Scriptural authority.

Foundation filled in

A few weeks ago my wife and I drove past again and the foundation had been filled in.

Closeup of house on blocks

So this is my picture of the ELCIC right now.

When Peeter first asked me about speaking today he suggested the topic of “Identifying the Theological Divide”. That made sense because the contributions I have tried to make during these six years of discussion have mostly been about the depth and seriousness of the divide that was being suggested and that has now taken place with this new Statement. There is a single, key concept that is at the heart of my

observations, that has contributed first to the confusion around the central question, then to the unfairness of how it was handled, and finally to the significance of the decision and why it makes leaving the ELCIC a reality we must consider. It explains why the ELCIC feels like this (house).

Here's the Title and Subtitle I had mentally constructed for my presentation today:

Adiaphora and Why It Matters

Adiaphora:
what it is and what it isn't
. . . (it's not confessional!) . . . and why
the difference between confessional and adiaphora
means it is right
– both legitimate and necessary –
to leave the ELCIC
(oops, to allow the ELCIC
to make this dramatic deviation
and leave the historic, catholic & apostolic church)
and to continue to be the church
as, or with, another church body

This is what I believe we have come together today to consider.

“Adiaphora” is a Greek word that means “indifferent things”. In fact, Lutherans should be experts about adiaphora because of some of the Reformation controversies. There is a whole article in the Formula of Concord, both Epitome and Solid Declaration devoted to adiaphora. The title and first paragraph in the Epitome give a good definition and description:

The Formula of Concord, Epitome, Kolb & Wengert, p. 515

X.
Concerning Ecclesiastical Practices
Which Are Called Adiaphora or Indifferent Matters

A dispute also occurred among theologians of the Augsburg Confession over ceremonies or ecclesiastical practices that are neither commanded nor forbidden in God's Word but that were introduced in the churches for the sake of good order and decorum.
(the Epitome goes on for two pages, 515-516; the Solid Declaration is six pages long, pp. 635-640)

There is a second primary source for the concept of adiaphora that is found in the Augsburg Confession itself, the defining document of the Lutheran Church. It is found in Article VII:

The Augsburg Confession—Latin Text, Kolb & Wengert, p. 43

[VII. Concerning the Church]

Likewise, they teach that one holy church will remain forever. The church is the assembly of saints in which the gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly. And it is enough for the true unity of the church to agree concerning the teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. It is not necessary that human traditions, rites, or ceremonies instituted by human beings be alike everywhere. As Paul says [Eph. 4:5,6]: “One faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all . . .”

This gives us a second description as “human traditions, rites, or ceremonies instituted by human beings.” But let’s also pause to notice that it is exactly this article that establishes the Lutheran prerequisite for church unity, that is, “to agree concerning the teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments” and that this requirement for unity is clearly in contrast to “adiaphora”, to the “human traditions, rites, or ceremonies”. And so we can summarize the definition of adiaphora as:

“adiaphora” is . . .

“. . . ceremonies or ecclesiastical practices that are neither commanded nor forbidden in God’s Word . . .” (Formula of Concord)

and

“. . . human traditions, rites, or ceremonies instituted by human beings . . .” (Augsburg Confession)

And here is one more thing to put on the table as a reminder of what we also do say is confessional, things that do matter, what we do believe about what is commanded and forbidden in God’s Word, as stated in our Confession of Faith, shared identically by church, synods and congregations, and “unalterable.”

Confession of Faith
Article II of ELCIC Constitution

...

Section 3. This church [*synod, congregations*] confesses the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God, through which God still speaks, and as the only source of the church’s doctrine and the authoritative standard for the faith and life of the church.

Study Experiences:

- * Lower Fraser Valley Ministerial, February 1993 to May 1994, using Six Studies on Homosexuality (1985) by Erwin Buck for the ELCC.
- * Shepherd of the Valley, Langley, BC, Sunday morning Adult Class, September 2002 to December 2003, using Studies on Homosexuality and the Church (2001) by Erwin Buck for the ELCIC.

During the 1990s for a time I was Dean of the Lower Fraser Valley Conference and we assigned ourselves the task of working on Erwin Buck's Six Studies on Homosexuality, trying to spend an hour at each monthly meeting. Well, we did "better and worse", sometimes preparing, sometimes falling back on anecdotes and stories. But what I remember most is the feeling that we were talking past each other, missing each other's main points, as if we had completely different assumptions and foundations. Towards the end I suggested that we poll ourselves on the various options Dr. Buck had outlined in his last Study and being met with blank looks and then vehement objections . . . as if "voting" implied a concept of decision-making that was unacceptable or foreign to others' ways of thinking.

Then, in 2001, Dr. Buck brought out a second version of these studies for the ELCIC. We resolved that we would study it fully and carefully, not setting a prior schedule for starting or finishing, but simply working sentence by sentence, idea by idea, looking up all the Bible references, cross-referencing them ourselves when other things came to mind. I am tremendously grateful for the dozen or so folks who joined me in this. It's the kind of thing we all should have done sometime in order to have a ground of confidence about this issue.

But not everyone could do it! Rob came to the first session, and then to my office afterwards. "We can't do this," he said. "This is forbidden in the Bible and we shouldn't even be talking about it. It's wrong to be talking about it!" That seemed pretty extreme and I tried to reason with him, "But people are asking us to talk about this in the church – surely it's reasonable to just talk about it?" It seemed reasonable and necessary to me but not to Rob and he never came back. Well, Rob's vehemence and the memory of our clergy mis-connects – or dis-connects – for some reason ignited the concepts of adiaphora and confessional from Seminary and I discovered a framework for understanding what was going on. I shared it with the group the next Sunday:

*I go to www.cqresources.ca, to "Chart" and click on the PDF link
Chart
[. . . and I describe the chart for a bit]*

This became the way we carried out our Studies, taking the subject out each week, talking about it, but putting it back in the area of "Forbidden" and reminding ourselves that's where the Church understood it to be. I would refer to the 1970 LCA Statement that had been affirmed as the official ELCIC policy. I was confident that it wasn't going to change without a clear question and a fair process.

I am grateful for both those experiences as times to study deeply, to have years to consider and reflect, and for insights gained – all well before church and synod actions were proposed.

ELCIC Essay Project and “A Clear Question”

Considering the Matter of Same-Sex Blessings

At the 2004 Eastern Synod Assembly, the following motion was passed:

That the Eastern Synod petition the National Church Council to initiate a study of the theological, ecclesiological, and pastoral implications of authorizing a parish-based local option to perform same-sex blessings and bring appropriate recommendations to the 2005 National Convention.

...

The Essays project

(from <http://www.elcic.ca/docs/2005/blessings.html>)

The 2004 Eastern Synod Assembly initiated the national discussion sooner and more dramatically than I had ever expected. This is the opening paragraph of a whole section on the national website that described an essay project. Twenty-two authors were enlisted by the ELCIC – to tell the chosen ELCIC side of things – and Additional Contributions were also invited.

Additional Contributions

...

Bart Eriksson (two), Brad Everett, Phil Gagnon (two), Daniel Glaeske, Don Hall (†), K. Glen Johnson, John Lefsrud, Tom Lurvey, Victor and Shirley Mollerup, Daryle Niedermayer, Mike Wellunscheg, . . .

- **Tim Johnson:** A Clear Question

Many of us (here today) took up pen or keyboard and took part, including me. That essay still does the best job of describing the significance of the confessional and adiaphora divide and so let’s take some time to look at it (and that’s why it is one thing I have given you to take home today).

*Use a handout ???, “A Clear Question”, pages 1-4 OR
Go to www.cqresources.ca and then to the PDF
at A Clear Question essay*

(in case there's no time to go to the essay, that section has these key ideas:)

- * Two opposite views call for a clear choice
- * It's not itself adiaphora = Chart
- * The Adiaphora Conundrum
- * Rules of reasoned debate disguise the issue
- * Is of confessional integrity (no sin, no grace) (James Nestingen about "justification")
- * Divisive issue by its nature, not intention (Pannenberg)

. . . coming back

Some of the rest of the essay now seems to be historical, about the situation in 2005. Nevertheless, it also has these other ideas of more enduring significance:

Other ideas in "A Clear Question"

- * Frederick Gaiser's suggestion about Luther's *"Theses Concerning Faith & Law"*
- * Ask the church, don't tell the church
- * Proper process for resolving a confessional question
- * leaders need to care more about proper process than about their desired result

Folks, that is the heart of everything I am saying this morning: Confessional or Adiaphora? Which is this? It simply cannot be both. To change our understanding that something is "commanded or forbidden in God's Word" to where it is neither commanded nor forbidden is always a confessional decision and that's why it is legitimate to consider leaving a church that takes such an action. It's legitimate to leave because of the nature of the issue. And so, if your own conclusion about the issue itself is that it is "commanded or forbidden in God's Word", then you are right to leave and I think you probably should leave. Yes, that's how serious it is.

Follow-up: Clear Question Resources

Well, that was the basic insight I tried to share in my essay and I obviously hoped it would help the church's discussion – especially that we take the issue more seriously as leading us to a confessional-level decision. However, my precious insight was ignored (– as were many of yours, too, right?). And so I tried to say these things louder, better, in other ways, working my way up the "chain of command" in the church. Many of you have worked hard and long at this as well. I'm going to share some of my further story for a couple reasons:

1. Because it's an example -- a tiny, personal tale of the "Failure of Dissent."
2. But also to offer further "Tools", because many of these give more examples, better arguments, stronger evidence for treating the main question as a confessional issue. They were shared and ignored within the ELCIC's process – but they may be of some use to you.

Incidentally, most of these I have now made available on a simple website called “Clear Question Resources” that can be found at www.cqresources.ca.

Clear Question Resources:

www.cqresources.ca

(which you can access anytime)

Here’s some of the story and some of the tools:

“Chart” = from my letter to my bishops, Bishop Ray Schultz and Bishop Gerhard Preibisch, March 1, 2006

- * “Chart” = expanded version of the chart from “A Clear Question” describing what was being missed
- * Went on to describe the **“Adiaphora Fallacy”** as a deliberate claim, “making one contestant into the referee”

Objections to NCC 2006 = an accompanying piece to a letter I sent to NCC December 7, 2006

- * Example from 2005 NCC Background Information: *“This issue is not one of confessional integrity; therefore . . . (= why people feel railroaded)*
- * Names three ways (briefly) this is a mistake
 1. Logical or academic mistake
 2. Theological mistake (Reformation)
 3. Pastoral mistake, failure to listen

Johnson & Mitchler letter 2007 = Ed Mitchler and myself to all congregations and rostered clergy, May 30, 2007

- * Our cover letter, brief summary of lots of these ideas and concepts
- * **Questions & Answers 2007** = arguments about the issue itself
- * **ST Jacobson essay 2005** (*thanks, Phil*) = theological presentation of why this is not an adiaphoron; certainly indicates it is legitimate to believe so and say so.

Letter to Bishops & Theologians 2008 = letter to all bishops, seminary faculties, etc., October 2, 2008

- * Thesis: “That a debate about whether an issue is of confessional status or not (i.e. adiaphora) is itself always a confessional issue, by its nature, and never adiaphora.”
- * Asking for “theological objectivity”, to stand apart from the question itself (and personal opinions) and consider the nature of the question
- * Arguments for Handling as a Confessional Issue (3)
- * Two Testimonies (Pannenberg & Gaiser)
- * Forms of the Adiaphora Conundrum

Arguments for Handling as a Confessional Issue

1. Logical or Academic Argument: (from the Chart and the Adiaphora Conundrum)
2. Theological Argument: from the Reformation, Formula of Concord, Art. X, why even adiaphora matters become “confessional” when which side of the line they are on comes into question.
3. Pastoral Argument: A key pastoral skill is “to listen with understanding” but even pastoral experts (on NCC, etc.) seem unable to understand that others are saying this is a confessional issue; they certainly do not acknowledge that they are listening.

Forms of the Adiaphora Conundrum

1. The Reasoned Debate Form
2. The Automatic Assumption Form
3. The Academic Form
4. The “Most Charitable Construction” Form
5. The Leadership Form
6. The Unity Form
7. The Advocacy Form

Was it a Clear Question?

In all cases I wanted, and urged, for a Clear Question and a Fair Process

Was it a Clear Question?

- Yes: Clear that it would change policy, change marriage, allow blessing, ordaining, rostering
- No: Refused to recognize the move from confessional to adiaphora as being a confessional issue (i.e. not clear about the nature and importance of the question)
- ???: Minimal references to key Scripture under debate (i.e. not clear about what the Scriptures say)

Was it a Fair Process? Here it is clearly a failing Report

Was it a Fair Process?

- No: Committed the “Adiaphora Fallacy”, deliberately using adiaphora ground-rules
- No: Bishops did not defend the Church’s tradition, nor provided others to do so; ignored those who did defend the tradition
- No: Told the Church what to do; did not ask
- No: Reported none of the content of responses to Study or Draft
- No: Failed to poll the grassroots of the Church
- Yes: Public face of the Convention was of openness, evenness, fairness, extended time for debate, “gave up coffee for sex”. . .
- but: . . . ?? . . . had set up the “playing field” long before the Convention

I began by making these claims

Adiaphora and Why It Matters

Adiaphora:
what it is and what it isn’t
. . . (it’s not confessional!) . . .
and why it means it is right
– both legitimate and necessary –
to leave the ELCIC
(oops, to allow the ELCIC
to make this dramatic deviation
and leave the historic, catholic & apostolic church)
and continue to be the church
as, or with, another church body

If we have time here, some discussion:

What is your understanding of “confessional or adiaphora”?

*What has been your experience of “confessional or adiaphora”
on this issue?*

Do you see this as making it legitimate to consider leaving the ELCIC?

(. . . but I want to get to two other things, including the “Motion on Unity”.)

Now, from this point on I don't have the text part of the presentation, only the PowerPoint slides:

Last minute surprises:

A couple last minute surprises, April 3, 2011:

Statement, pages 7 and 14:

“Matters of sexuality and morality are not salvation issues.”

Motion on Unity / 2nd paragraph:

*“. . . any attempt to divide the church because of disagreements over
morals, polity or liturgy is an unacceptable confusion of law and gospel,
. . . ”*

“Matters of sexuality and morality are not salvation issues.” (Statement)

Is this about Law and Gospel?

* matters of sexuality and morality = Law

* salvation = Gospel

In this case, this is a “truism”, a statement of obvious truth, that the Law is not the Gospel. Is based on the truth of justification, that we are not saved by keeping the law but by believing the promise (Gospel).

However . . .

- * Not true that “Immorality is not a salvation issue.” (*thanks to Bart Eriksson for his Report to his congregation, many quotes*)
- * We get nervous at the suggestion of separating Law and Gospel from each other
- * And we get really nervous at the implication that salvation “trumps” morality, that the Gospel negates the Law (= antinomianism)
- * And this claim is extended to all morality

Faith, Order and Doctrine Committee: Three Motions (from the April 3, 2011 letter from NCC that accompanied the Final Draft, Pages 2-3)

1. Motion on the Unity of the Church

(became in the Bulletin of Reports, p. F-100, and at the Convention . . .)

MOTION #26

That the 2011 Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada in convention adopt the following affirmation as representing the position of this church and communicate this action to congregations, partner churches in Canada, sister churches in The Lutheran World Federation and other Lutheran church associations in Canada:

An Affirmation Concerning the Unity of the Church

As a confessional Lutheran Church which bases its life and teaching on the Scriptures, the Ecumenical Creeds and the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada affirms with the confessors at Augsburg in 1530 that “it is enough for the unity of the church to agree concerning the teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments” (AC VII).

We affirm that the church ought not be divided because of disagreement over moral issues, no matter how distressing such disagreement might be. We believe that any attempt to divide the church because of disagreements over morals, polity or liturgy is an unacceptable confusion of Law and Gospel, which will lead inevitably to a distortion of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We encourage ELCIC members, congregations and synods and churches who share our commitment to the scriptures, creeds and confessions and who disagree with one another over issues of morals, polity (including standards for ordination or consecration) and/or liturgy to remain in dialogue and unity with one another and maintain unity in the gospel and the sacraments as St Paul recommends in 1 Corinthians 1:10-17. We encourage all Lutherans to work for and nurture the unity of the confessional witness to the Gospel which is essential to the Lutheran tradition. We ask those persons, congregations, synods and/or churches who are in disagreement to refrain from actions that will divide the body of Christ.

Significance of the Motion on Unity:

- * “Closing barn door after horses have left”, fire that chased horses out is the Statement; if you leave because of the Statement then this motion does not apply to you
- * Proves that NCC knows this action is confessional; “Iron fist in velvet glove.”
- * What happened to “Agreeing to Disagree”?
(*It should mean Lothar Schwabe’s “Peaceful Separation Commission”!*)

(Some) Content in the Motion on Unity:

- “. . . any attempt to divide the church because of disagreements over morals, polity or liturgy is an unacceptable confusion of law and gospel, . . .”
- * Formula of Concord: “adiaphora” is “. . . ceremonies or ecclesiastical practices that are neither commanded nor forbidden . . .”
 - * “ceremonies” = liturgy
 - * “ecclesiastical practices” = polity
 - * Appears to make morals a matter of adiaphora – and this is not just about sex! . . . but all morals
 - * Motion on Unity may be a confusion of law and gospel; it certainly is a confusion of law and adiaphora, that “morals” are not “commanded nor forbidden” in God’s Word? (is so obviously wrong)

An unsettling, and growing, awareness:

- * That the true “teaching of the Gospel” that defines the church and its unity (in the Augsburg Confession, Article VII) may be being suggested to mean the “Gospel” alone, as distinct from the Law, so that disagreements about the Law should not affect the unity of the church.
- * = Everyone take a deep breath . . . Because that is a truly profound “theological divide”

Church concerned only with Gospel, not Law?

- * Re-think the whole “Justice” agenda. Justice is a matter of law, not gospel.
- * I believe our “Confession of Faith” is talking about both Law and Gospel, when saying the Scriptures are, “. . . the only source of the church’s doctrine and the authoritative standard for the faith and life of the church.”

We all need to dive back into the Book of Concord and its excellent Index, and research: Law and Gospel. (one e.g.)

When we reflect on this dispute [Concerning Law and Gospel] correctly, we recognize that its cause lies in the fact that in the holy, divine Scripture and in the ancient and recent teachers of the church, the little word “gospel” is not used and understood in the same, single sense at all times, but in two different ways. Sometimes it is used in such a way to mean the entire teaching of Christ our Lord, which in his own ministry on earth and in the New Testament he commanded to be carried out. In this sense the term includes the explanation of the law and the proclamation of the favor and grace of God, his heavenly Father, as it is written in Mark 1[:1,4]: “the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” And soon thereafter there is a summary of its chief parts, “repentance” and “the forgiveness of sins.” . . .

Book of Concord, Formula, Solid Declaration, Kolb & Wengert, p. 582, TJ’s emphasis

Whew!

And a parable of leaving:

UNSTOPPABLE

My parable of leaving = DVD, Unstoppable,

1:21:08 = Scene 24 plus one FF click

1:22:01 = Start of animation of tanks exploding

1:22:09 FREEZE, tanks exploding

1:23:10 FREEZE, wheels in air

1:23:20 FREEZE, pipes off = feels like we're being thrown off

1:23:25 FREEZE, locomotive off balance, in air, smoke leave it here

movie goes on – you know they probably save it – but not all parables fit in all places

TJ = ELCIC has made the high speed, abrupt turn

Momentum of loyalty and commitment to authority of Scriptures ~~throws us off~~ ???

No, it carries us on.

(. . . and am I going to use this? Did not get to use all of this in Calgary.)

It's about objectivity, folks, objectivity. Objectivity is the ability to see things the way they truly are, rather than the way you would like them to be. I claim that the distinction between confessional integrity and adiaphora is an objective reality, like the Law of Gravity, as is the truth that a dispute about whether something is confessional or adiaphora is always a confessional issue. It's not an opinion. That's why I claim that it is legitimate to leave the ELCIC over it. It is a church-defining and church-dividing action the ELCIC has taken and, if we disagree with it, it's not you or me who may be leaving the church, but the ELCIC that has re-defined itself by this action. So it's legitimate to leave.

Is it right? Well, if you disagree with what the ELCIC decided, then it is right for you to leave, as individuals and as congregation. Let's face it, a majority at the Convention favoured the Statement and the motions and so obviously some want to go that way. Well, let them . . . but we don't need to. I loved Lothar Schwabe's suggestions a few years ago of a "Peaceful Separation Commission". Yup, we need to part, so let's do it peacefully, fairly and openly. (You would think that is what "Agreeing to Disagree" meant.)

And I think the resistance to seeing it as a confessional issue and all the unfairness of the process makes it doubly necessary to leave. I really doubt that a fair and open process that allowed the other points of view to be spoken and that fairly asked the Church at the grassroots level – that really

sought the discernment of the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ – would have come to this result.

As for “A renewed emphasis on evangelism and world missions” Amen! Let’s get at it!

Questions? etc.