

Who or What is *Here We Stand*?

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Equipping the Saints for God's Mission

April 26, 2007

Who or What is *Here We Stand*? is succinctly summarized at our web site:



Unless I am convinced by scripture and plain reason - I do not accept the authority of the popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other - my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen." - Luther appearing before the Diet of Worms, April 1521

Here We Stand

[Home](#) [Who We Are](#) [Letters to Congregations](#) [Confessional Declaration](#) [Contact Us](#)

Welcome

Welcome to our web site!

We are lay members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) who are deeply concerned about the revisionist theological drift that is taking place within the ELCIC. In response to this crisis of faith in the ELCIC, we are taking a stand by subscribing to a confessional declaration, entitled "Here We Stand", which is grounded on Scripture and our Lutheran Confessions. We invite others in the ELCIC who equally share our concern to do the same.

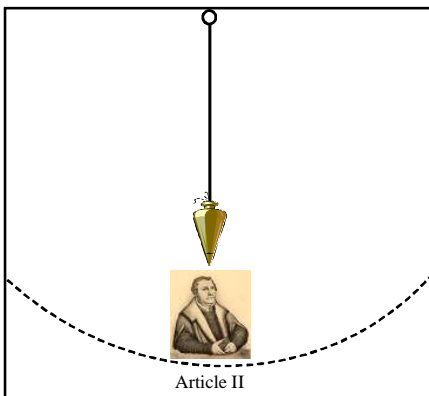
To learn more about us, please follow the ["Who We Are"](#) link above.

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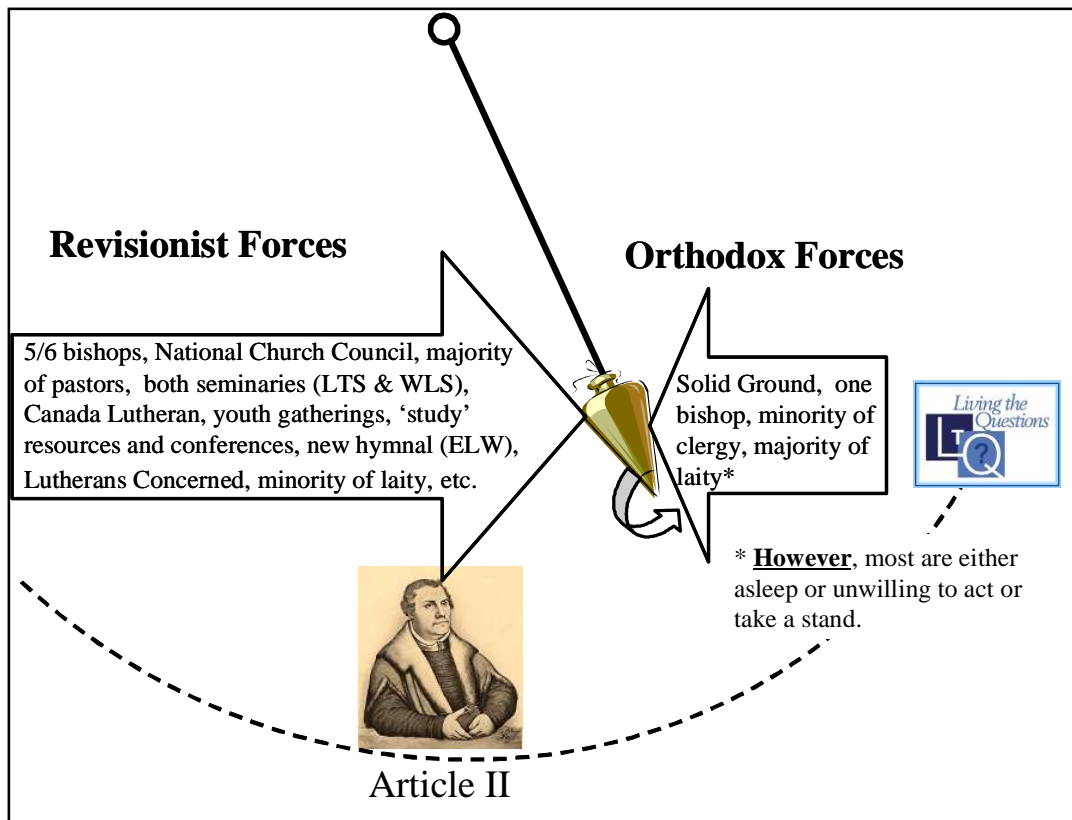
I would like to say at the outset that *Here We Stand* is an initiative that is independent of Solid Ground. Nonetheless, we stand together with Solid Ground, sharing a common objective to "Empower and encourage our fellow Lutherans to take a stand on what we believe according to Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions".

Before we get to the *Here We Stand* confessional declaration, I would like to provide some background as to why such an initiative was undertaken. According to sections 3 & 4 of Article II (Confession of Faith) of the ELCIC constitution:

We confess the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are "the inspired Word of God" and "the only source of the Church's doctrine and the authoritative standard for the faith and life of the Church", **and** the documents of the **Book of Concord** of 1580 "are witnesses to the way in which the Holy Scriptures have been correctly understood and explained".



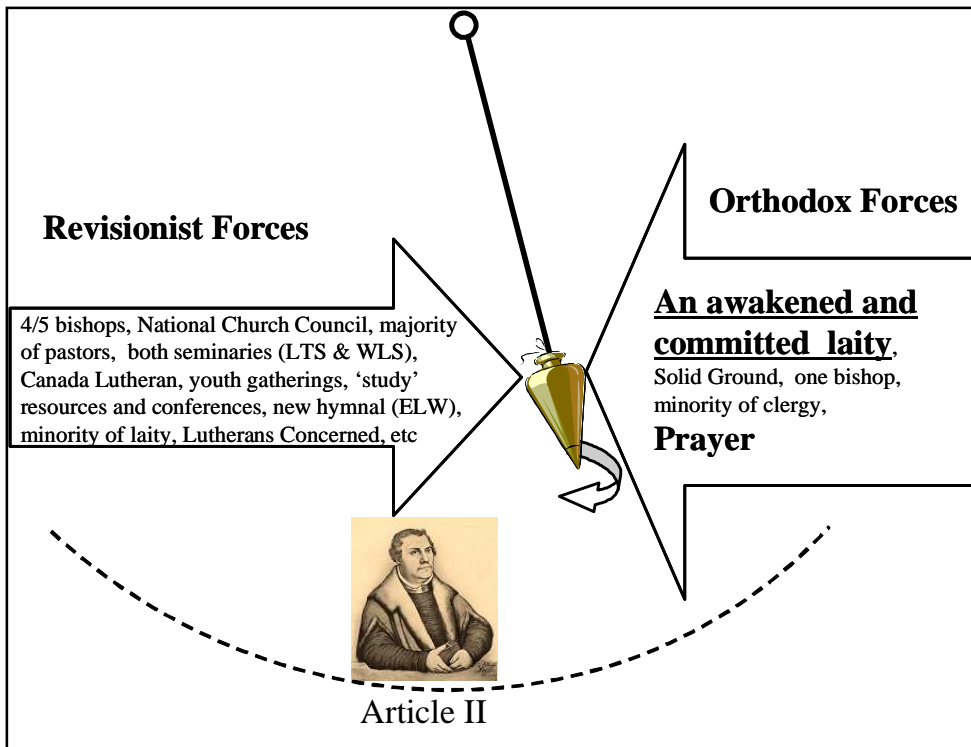
In this pictorial representation of my understanding of the situation, Article II is indicated here by Martin Luther holding the Bible and the pendulum shows how we have historically been aligned with Article II.



However in recent years we have witnessed a theological drift away from our traditional, orthodox Lutheran position. Those involved in the “revisionist forces” causing such a drift are indicated in the figure to the left. Trying to resist this drift at the present time is

a smaller “orthodox force”. As you can see, unless the resistance from the “orthodox forces” grows larger, then the theological drift in this church will continue. [Note, this figure is slightly different from that shown at the conference in that it shows Living the Questions as an indication of where this theological drift may be heading. See the article, “Is This Where the Lutheran Church is Heading?” at the Solid Ground web site: <http://www.solid-ground.ca/a-isthiswhere.htm>]

In 2003, Dr. Robert Benne (Director, The Center for Religion and Society Roanoke College, Salem, VA) made the following assessment of the situation in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA): “Our success in preventing the ELCA from continuing on its disastrous ‘LPD’ (*Liberal Protestant Drift*) depends upon our capacity to awaken the laity and get them to project their voices.” I would suggest that the same can be said for the ELCIC: “Our success in preventing the **ELCIC** from continuing on its disastrous ‘LPD’ (*Liberal Protestant Drift*) depends upon our capacity to awaken the laity and get them to project their voices.”

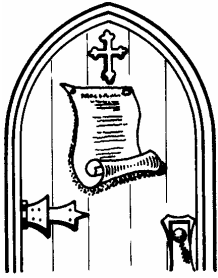


Thus, it would appear that the only hope of arresting the theological drift and moving this church back to its orthodox Lutheran position is “an awakened and committed laity” that is prepared to say “enough – it’s time to take a stand!” To take a stand in support of the traditional values and teachings of our church in the face of efforts by some (primarily in leadership positions) to radically reshape the theology of this church.

Some of the motivation for the *Here We Stand* initiative comes from the *Book of Concord*. For example, “*We regard this confession (Augsburg Confession) as a pure, Christian creed, which (after the Word of God) should guide true Christians in this time, just as in earlier times Christian creeds and confessions were formulated in God’s church when major controversies broke out.*” [Formula of Concord (Solid Declaration), The Book of Concord, Kolb & Wengert, page 525.]

The *Book of Concord* provided confessional statements responding to the false teachings and controversies evident in the 16th century just as in earlier times Christian creeds and confessions were formulated in God’s church (The Apostles’ Creed, The Nicene Creed, The Athanasian Creed). Likewise, we regard the *Here We Stand* confessional declaration as responding to the false teachings and controversies of our time.

In September of last year ten ELCIC pastors met in Sherwood Park to draft the *Here We Stand* confessional declaration. Seven of the pastors were from Alberta, one was from B.C., and two were from Saskatchewan. The purpose of the meeting was to draft a confessional declaration reaffirming where we stand as a confessional church on teachings which depart from the authority of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions (*Book of Concord*). Such a declaration would provide a visual banner (or rallying point) around which ELCIC congregations who are concerned about the drift away from traditional orthodox Lutheran theology could gather.



Here is the Preface to the *Here We Stand* confessional declaration:

The ELCIC is in a crisis of faith. The same sex blessing issue is only one symptom of that which divides us.

At the heart of the crisis is a false gospel that is a departure from the historic teaching of Christianity as stated in the Book of Concord which Lutherans understand to be a faithful interpretation of Holy Scripture.

We remain in full accord with the ELCIC's confession of faith as stated in Article II of this Church's constitution. Therefore we must reject any new teaching that contradicts, the Scriptures, the theology of the Lutheran Church, our constitution and the teaching of the Christian Church both today and throughout time.

The declaration includes six articles covering:

1. The Word of God
2. Law and Gospel
3. The Trinity
4. Creation and the Image of God
5. The Uniqueness of Christ
6. Christian Inclusivity

The format for the various articles was guided by the Formula of Concord from The Book of Concord. According to Dr. Andrew Pfeiffer, Professor at Australia Lutheran College:

The genius of the Formula of Concord is that it shows us how to do theology today. First, it teaches us to define the disputed issues. Then it seeks to find clarity on the controversy by looking at the Scriptures, the early church and the former confessional writings. On that basis it makes a clear confession. "We believe, teach and confess..." "We reject and condemn..."

I don't have time to go through each of the articles in the *Here We Stand* confessional declaration, but shown here, for example, is Article 2 on Law and Gospel:

2. Law and Gospel

We believe God's Word comes to us as law and gospel. The law judges our sin and the gospel pronounces forgiveness of sins. The law maintains its function in ordering society and driving us to Christ. Because each of us is still both saint and sinner it is still necessary to preach both law and gospel even to those who believe.

We reject a false gospel which voids the law, leading to a false understanding that we are no longer sinners in need of repentance.



Here We Stand sent out two letters to every congregation in the ELCIC.

One letter, along with the Confessional Declaration, was sent on October 31 of last year (also happens to be the day that Luther posted his 95 theses on the Wittenberg church door almost 500 years ago).

The second letter was sent on January 7th of this year. The letters were addressed to the Council Chairs of each congregation. We

concluded each letter asking the Council Chair to share the letter with his/her pastor, Church Council and congregational members. The big assumption, however, was that the letter actually reached the council chair and an even bigger assumption that it was circulated further.

At this point in time the *Here We Stand* movement consisted of the 18 lay people who were signatories for the two letters. Sixteen of the lay people were from the Alberta synod and two were from the Saskatchewan synod. Having the declaration written by clergy but subscribed to by lay people was similar to the history of the *Augsburg Confession* in the *Book of Concord*. The *Augsburg Confession* was written by a theologian, Philip Melancthon, but the seven signatories were lay persons, albeit princes and town council representatives of their day, and they were the ones who delivered the *Augsburg Confession* to the Holy Roman Emperor. We have also placed ads in various ELCIC publications, including *The Eastern Synod Lutheran*, the *Canada Lutheran*, and the ELW publication *Esprit*.

The “declaration” would provide a place for churches to hang their confessional hats and say, “It is **Here** that **We Stand** and stay, alongside these neighbours in the faith. We confess the same beliefs and want to get on with doing what Jesus has called us to do.”

As I mentioned earlier, the *Here We Stand* confessional declaration was primarily intended to provide a visual banner (or rallying point) around which ELCIC congregations who are concerned about the drift away from traditional orthodox Lutheran theology could gather. In that respect *Here We Stand* movement has not been a booming success. To date, I am sorry to report that, to our knowledge, only 9 congregations (3 from SK synod, 2 from Eastern Synod and 4 from Alberta Synod) have subscribed to the *Here We Stand* confessional declaration.

However, *Here We Stand* also invited individuals to join the original 18 as subscribers to the *Here We Stand* declaration. Clicking on the home page “Contacts” tab provides an on-line and a mail-in form for individuals to subscribe. To date, 315 individual subscribers have joined the original 18. This has been very helpful in building a network of concerned lay people within the ELCIC.

I would like to conclude my presentation by saying that in the end, although it did not achieve its primary objective, I believe that *Here We Stand* was well worth the effort.