

Friday, January 18, 2008

## Topics, and improvements for the PMW

Both of the Plucked Chicken's readers know that it tends to focus on matters of importance only within the ELS. In fact, a good bit of what I write about would be called "unimportant" by at least a few within the ELS. That's why I write about such things. It's why the Plucked Chicken exists. This is not a general-purpose blog, at least so far. I don't have time for recounting much from my own life, nor do I really think anyone would want to read it. Most of my personal interests are rather esoteric, and would therefore not be of interest to the general populace (any more than ELS matters are). But every group of people has a tendency to bury some topics that should be discussed, possibly in the vain hope that ignoring something will heal it. That doesn't work so well with infectious diseases or grave wounds in the body, and it doesn't work so well either in a body like the ELS. Healing requires attention, just as adopting a doctrinal statement requires complete, careful, and mutual deliberation. Such attention and deliberation have been wanting in the ELS. Hence, the Plucked Chicken.

As I have the opportunity, I will note some improvements that could be made to [the PMW](#). Here's the first. It says (verbatim):

We reject the teaching that the Holy Spirit comes without the external Word but through their own preparations and works (AC V, Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary, 9).

That's not really a quote from AC V. It's a paraphrase. Do you see the problem? It says "but through *their* own preparations and works." To whom does that pronoun refer? Hmmm. I'll give you a minute to think about it.

Remember, this is the actual quasi-sacred text of the PMW adopted by the ELS in 2005, the same text that, if challenged, can excite such written exclamations as, "What further need do we have of witnesses?" If you give up, and would like me to reveal the antecedent of the pronoun, read on.

Here's the answer. The pronoun refers to a noun that did not survive the paraphrase. The antecedent is originally expressed in the phrase "the Anabaptists and others."

My suggestion is this. Instead of paraphrasing that paragraph from AC V, include the whole thing, the way it's actually written in the *Hymnary*.

We condemn the Anabaptists and others who think that the Holy Spirit comes without the external Word but through their own preparations and works.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in PMW at 18:20

I don't get it. Can you help me out on this?

Also, I'm thinking that we've had enough of the doctrinal statements in the ELS for a while. Lately, they've been nothing but troublesome. Enough already.

Norman Teigen ELS layman

Anonymous on Jan 22 2008, 17:43

Sure. You'll see the point easily if you read the quote from the PMW (We reject...) side by side with the actual wording from the Augsburg Confession (We condemn the Anabaptists...). The actual wording was changed, leaving the word "their" hanging, referring back to... nothing. The grammar was broken, and the broken grammar adopted at convention.

I think we've had too many ELS doctrinal statements. Thankfully, I don't see any new ones on the horizon. We need people willing to get out the launderer's soap and sit as a purifier of silver, so to speak.

Anonymous on Jan 22 2008, 23:36

Hi Jesse,

This is so funny. As in ironic. But chuckle funny, also. When I first read this post, I had to read and re-read the first sentence of your post "Both of the Plucked Chicken's readers know..."

I can assume that I and one other are not the only readers of this blog. I used my imagination to deduce that you had originally started with a different sentence and that in the process of changing it, you inadvertently left in the word "both."

When I originally read the PMW, which at that time was called something else (PCM statement, maybe?) I remember reading the sentence you point out in this post, and being very frustrated. Frustrated that in an official document, even the grammar was careless. Regardless of whether or not one agreed with the content, the technical errors ought to have been enough to deter ELS members from supporting this document.

But, I digress. Just as in your blog today, I was required to use my imagination, to assume and infer your meaning, a reader of the PMW must use those same leaps at times to get a meaning.

In the sentence you quote above, I used different acrobatics to get a meaning. Instead of checking the source material as I should have done, to find the true antecedent, I chose a new pronoun to clarify the statement in my mind. So I came up with, "We reject the teaching that the Holy Spirit comes without the external Word but through ones own preparations and works." In this case, the meaning is close to the same. My constructed meaning is missing the specific reference to the Anabaptists.

When even grammar is unclear, the reader is left to use imagination, assumptions and inferences to come up with a meaning. When that is the case, there will be as many meanings out there as there are readers.

Do we want to base our official doctrines on imagination, assumptions and inferences? Dare we bind others to a writing that not only allows, but in places demands that the reader only guess at the meaning?

It reminds me of the parable of the talents. If we can't be faithful in the little things, like grammar, why should we be considered trustworthy with the bigger issues of logical conclusions based on God's Word or historical and Biblical research?

Mary

Anonymous on Jan 23 2008, 08:08

Thanks for posting your insights, Mary. I agree.

As for "both" of the readers, it was my weird way of saying I don't have illusions of grandeur about the PC. In fact, it seems that this post has elicited a comment from "both" readers already! :-)

Anonymous on Jan 23 2008, 10:13

Which re-enforces the point perfectly! When left to my own imagination, I assumed you had made an error. When in fact you were merely having a little fun with us.

Anonymous on Jan 23 2008, 12:27

Now "both" becomes at least three, and I have several friends who regularly read this site!

In the humble opinion of this lay person, in order for any reconciliation to occur with the booted-out pastors and congregations, or with other congregations who are protesting but haven't yet been booted or resigned, the PMW is going to require considerable revision. While grammatical errors are a good--and hopefully non-controversial--place to start, that is only the beginning.

More important than the grammar, the Scriptural citations in the PMW do not support the document without a lot of implications, inferences and assumptions, which is not the way we confessional Lutherans have been taught to interpret Scripture!

Anonymous on Jan 23 2008, 13:11

Thanks for the encouraging words, cattail.

I hope that reconciliation is desirable for every one of our brothers in Christ, but for some reason I hesitate to assume so. We already know how the separated churches and pastors see the path toward reconciliation. They've been quite open about it, and seem ready to explain and discuss the issues that they see with those who ask. The same goes for the protesting congregations, in my experience. By contrast, public explanations and dialog have been scant on the other side. Maybe it's a defensive thing, or fear of losing face, or institutional arthritis. I can only guess. So again, I *hope* that everyone really wants genuine reconciliation.

Anonymous on Jan 23 2008, 20:33

Well, I am one that would like to see some reconciliation in the ELS. We'll have to get past the theology of this dispute.

I would suggest that every one take back his theological pronouncements and that we declare ourselves united again. There was no gain to all of this and much loss.

Norman Teigen ELS layman

Anonymous on Jan 31 2008, 08:57

I sympathize with your desire for reconciliation. Much good has not come from this experience, but there *are* lessons to be learned. We'll see if anyone actually learns them.

The model for reconciliation is found in the approach of those responsible for the Formula of Concord. It involved actually addressing the issues from scripture, not to defend personal agendas or sacred cows, nor to

discredit or attack any personalities, but to reach an accurate, biblical, mutual understanding. Even then, there were some who rejected the Formula because of that very approach, and we can expect the same. However, genuine concordists have been scarce in our time, while knee-jerk responses have not.

Anonymous on Jan 31 2008, 10:10