

Sunday, August 26, 2007

Confession "with great consensus"

I've written about the topic here before. But now, I'd just like to call your attention to [a remarkable post on Cyberbrethren](#) containing or excerpting a private letter of Hermann Sasse. I've been told that in some areas, Sasse is theologically unreliable. Fair enough. (Let's discuss it.) I've been told the same about Luther. It shouldn't be surprising. These were sinful human theologians. I am no better. But they also spoke and wrote God's Word, so it's worth keeping them around.

Here's a juicy quote:

"A confession is for the Lutheran Church never simply a set of propositions in which the church, or several churches, agree. This is the great misunderstanding of modern Protestantism that has crept also into the Lutheran Church. The idea of such modern "confession" is that some Christians, or whole churches, try to find out what their common convictions are, how each of them understands the Scriptures, and whether they can agree on a common understanding. This leads always to "confessions of a minimum," to the discovery and expression of the least common denominator. The careless interpretation of the Latin text of Augsburg Confession, Article 7 has lead even Lutherans to this view of the Confession of the Church. Many individuals agree in a certain common doctrine whatever that may be and ascribe the discovery of this common possession to the "guidance of the Spirit." But the consensus of which AC 7 speaks is the consensus in the maximum, in the true Gospel, as the German text shows: "dass da eintraechtlich nach reinem Verstand das Evangelium predigt und die Sakrament laut der Einsetzung Christi gereicht werden." The word "eintraechtlich" appears already in the first sentence of CA I and is rendered by the Latin "magno consensu."

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Doctrine at 15:48

Wednesday, August 15, 2007

Union and Schism

There is a way of speaking that expresses things that are not necessarily true at the time, but are nevertheless, at least plausible. It's called the subjunctive mood. This post is in the subjunctive mood. It helps us to discuss the substance of emotionally or politically-charged issues without descending into flame, both literally and figuratively.

A while back, I received an email from a reader about [this update](#) from the 2007 synod convention, written after the very first full day of the convention. The reader raises an important question. For the answer, I would refer all readers to an excellent ELS treatment of this subject called [Unity, Union, and Unionism](#). After that, I invite your comments, either here or via email.

It may seem strange to think of unionism at a time when [schism](#) may also be taking place. One might wonder if they are opposites, and if so, how could they be happening simultaneously? The short answer is that they are not opposites. They are two different branches from the same trunk. The trunk is any doctrine that is *not* found in holy scripture, whether it be positive (We teach...) or negative (We do not teach...). Unionism is the outward joining of an orthodox church with an unorthodox church on an unscriptural basis. Schism is the separation of two orthodox churches on an unscriptural basis. They both proceed from the same sort of trunk. Therefore, it wouldn't be so surprising to find both in the same place at the same time. That was a subjunctive statement.

Here is the reader's question.

You said

we will be basing our unity upon the mutual acceptance of a human document that apparently allows for a variety of interpretations.

I would like to know how that is different from what the ELCA and Roman Catholics did with that Joint Declaration thing they passed several years ago. Isn't it fairly well understood that they agreed to not bind each other to any specific meaning of certain terms, like justification, for instance; but they used terminology that would, in the name of unity, allow for multiple interpretations of the document.

Now I don't think that the PMW was intentionally done that way. At least I trust it was not. But by continuing to demand subscription to it even after it is well established that the differences exist, are we not guilty of the same thing we accuse the ELCA of with regard to the JDDJ?

Thanks for letting me vent-it is so incredibly obvious to me!

One difference is that none of the adherents to the JDDJ have objected to it. I suppose that's a tautology, but from our point of view, it makes a difference. The differences of understanding of the PMW may have allowed divergent points of view to overlook substantive disagreements between them, and that would (subjunctive) be bad. Yet the same set of differences has also produced a small but conscientious resistance to the PMW. This is what has absorbed many ELS resources this last couple of years. I don't see the same thing happening in the ELCA about the JDDJ.

If we were (subjunctive) to seriously examine our disagreements on a sound hermeneutical basis (on the Bible), then I would say we'd still be on the right track. If we were (subjunctive) to sweep our disagreements under the rug, attempt to eliminate them by a misuse of authority, or try for a political/rhetorical resolution via any number of [logical fallacies](#), then we would become the pot who called the kettle black.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Doctrine, PMW at 14:50

Protection from Discrimination

In the place where I live, the county court has decided to enact an ordinance against discrimination. In particular, this ordinance protects people who seek jobs or housing from discrimination based upon "sexual orientation," whether or not the applicants are homosexuals.

One of the commissioners commented that there had been a lot of testimony and debate about whether or not homosexuality is a lifestyle choice. Some say it is, while others seem to think it's genetic. This commissioner noted that the county court is in no position to decide whether homosexuality is a lifestyle choice, nor should it do so.

The court passed this ordinance, but that commissioner raised an important question: Did the Wasco county court decide whether homosexuality is a lifestyle choice, or not? This question has application to other legal jurisdictions, as well.

So, did they? Yes, they did, even if it was unintentionally.

Protection from discrimination based upon race and gender recognizes that these are *human* traits, not choices of individuals. Discrimination based upon such traits is wrong, unless the traits demonstrably disqualify the individual in question. (For example, no man can be a wet-nurse, strictly speaking, no matter how much anyone may wish otherwise.)

So every time government seeks to protect a special group from discrimination, it strongly implies the assumption that the protected group is *not* distinguished by a lifestyle choice, but by traits beyond the control of the protected group.

There may also be ordinances protecting the disabled from discrimination in various ways. Disabilities are not essential to humanity like race or gender, but they *are* beyond the control of the protected group. Nobody wants to become more disabled.

You may believe that homosexuality is not a choice, and deserves protection from discrimination. Do you believe the same thing about alcoholism? Or a lifestyle of stealing, gambling, or smoking? Some people find these destructive behaviors impossible to stop. But so far, our government has not chosen to make special protections for such people.

The debate about whether homosexuality is a choice may continue, though it will not continue past the Last Day. My point is that the Wasco county commissioners have now weighed in on the debate. They assume that homosexuality *is not* a lifestyle choice, and based upon this (perhaps overlooked) assumption, they have passed their non-discrimination ordinance.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Life at 07:29