

Thursday, October 25, 2007

Appeal Commission 2 Report is Out

I'm not going to repeat the findings here, yet. I can see how the conclusion makes sense, but I deeply lament that it brings our synod no closer to a peaceful resolution of the divisive spirit that began working in earnest at the 2005 synod convention. We have not figured out what is the proper course of action when a congregation perceives that an influential synod official has committed some grave error or public sin. Certainly, any impenitent sinner should not be communed. But how can this be applied when the person in question is a member of a sister congregation, and his own pastor disagrees that he has committed public sin? This is a poorly defined area of casuistry, which we have unwisely been expecting appeals commissions to deal with. I understand why the appeals commissions prefer not to do so, yet the door is open for the schismatic spirit in our midst to wreak further havoc.

You can see what I have written before on these matters [in other posts](#).

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Synod at 09:45

Monday, October 22, 2007

The Seventh Antithesis

The [PMW](#)'s seventh antithesis reads:

We reject the teaching that the Public Ministry of the Word is limited to the ministry of a parish pastor.

I have no problem with this antithesis, as I understand it. This may surprise some who suppose that I (or others) might object to including school teachers, musicians and the like under the heading "Public Ministry of the Word." But there are two good reasons I have no problem with this.

First, consider this earlier sentence in the statement, which elucidates the antithesis:

Therefore a presiding office, whether it is called that of pastor, shepherd, bishop, presbyter, elder or by any other name, is indispensable for the church.

In my [long explanation](#) of the PMW, I wrote:

This antithesis restates part of II.A.3, where we saw that there are several varieties of pastors, not just the parish variety. Each of the labels given in Scripture highlights a different aspect of the pastor's duties, leading us to believe that the mix of duties could differ from individual to individual. Some, called bishops, might have oversight over all the churches in a region. Others might be associate pastors forming a kind of pastoral committee. There are many possibilities. Today, those we call missionaries and chaplains are certainly pastors of a sort, and theological professors among us are pastors too.

That's the first reason I have no problem with it. As you can see, school teachers, musicians, and such are unrelated to the matter at hand, and are not included for consideration. (Such matters are considered under the next chief heading, "The Public Ministry of the Word in a Wider Sense, etc.")

Second, I have no problem with it because this antithesis is refining the definition of an English expression that is not defined in holy scripture.

The expression is "the Public Ministry of the Word." Even if (for the sake of argument) this antithesis meant to include school teachers under that term, it would only be describing our customary usage of an English expression. It would not be referring to the office that Jesus established, whose incumbents are charged as stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Cor. 4:1). The English term and the divinely-instituted office are two different things. The term is described in both a narrow and a wider sense, but the office exists perpetually, exactly [as Jesus defined it](#).

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in PMW at 12:25

Saturday, October 13. 2007

The Use of Reason and the Use of Aristotle

In giving Chemnitz's stance with regard to the Scriptures and his hermeneutical principles, it is necessary to consider his view of reason and the use of Aristotelian terms and conceptual usages. Chemnitz is a sharp thinker who recognizes the necessity of precise definitions and nice distinctions. He will draw valid conclusions from clear propositions of Scripture. But he follows Luther in holding that there is no place in theology for reason corrupted by natural man. In spiritual matters reason must take its premises from the Word. While at times it may be harmless to borrow Aristotelian terminology (such as *causa efficiens*, *causa instrumentalis*, *causa finalis*, *rem sacramenti*, etc.), it can become dangerous and limit the Word of God because these terms of Aristotle are designed for the secular world. There is a vast difference between the earthly kingdom and the spiritual or heavenly kingdom, where we deal with things which eye has not seen nor ear heard nor entered into the mind of man.

-- Bjarne Wollan Teigen, *The Lord's Supper in the Theology of Martin Chemnitz* p. 21.

It is worth noting that Chemnitz avoids the use of Aristotelian terms and concepts, yet still uses reason and logic in presenting theology. In particular, Teigen wrote "In spiritual matters reason must take its premises from the Word." He does not say that in spiritual matters, the whole deductive system of premises and conclusions is useless. No, he says that the premises must come from the Word. It follows (if I may), that scriptural premises will render scriptural conclusions.

Sometimes we have too much distrust of reason. A certain kind of distrust is healthy, as described above. But if we reject something simply *because* it was arrived at by the use of reason -- a glorious gift of God and a servant in the house of theology -- then we have gone too far, and thrown down an important tool or weapon that our Lord has given His Church.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Doctrine at 13:46

Paying Music Artists What They Deserve

Plenty of electrons have been spilled about this already. I'll limit my comments to a single point. In light of [news like this](#), how should music listeners respond? The RIAA would have us respond by purchasing more CDs of their artists' music. While I have no problem with those who do that, I think there is a much better response.

Stop buying music that is distributed through the traditional channel altogether. If you perceive that the traditional recording labels insist upon imposing unacceptable restrictions upon the sharing of their music (a practice beginning long before the digital age), then don't support them with your patronage. Don't give another dime to that branch of the industry, unless you have a very clear *need* to have some of the music that can only be obtained that way. Usually, we don't have such a need.

Instead, encourage alternative channels of music distribution like [Magnatune](#), which can give a dramatically higher percentage of sales proceeds to the artists themselves. At the same time, Magnatune allows its customers to sample the music of its artists as much as the customer would like, and pay (within reasonable limits) whatever they think it is worth, when it comes time to purchase.

Yes there are better alternatives for your music needs. I suggest that the best response to news like this is to use them in preference to the alternatives that poorly serve both customers and artists.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Life at 09:31

Absolution may be spoken by any Christian

Over at Cyberbrethren and apparently elsewhere, there has been some blogging about the nature of the Gospel. I mention Cyberbrethren in particular, because Pastor McCain seems to have a good handle on the matter, and Pastor Cwirla's comments included an important observation.

When we use the word "absolution," we use it in more than one sense. What we can say about "absolution" varies depending upon the sense in which the word is used.

Pastor McCain's main point is that every Christian can absolve (in a wide sense) his neighbors by speaking the Gospel to them. This can take various forms, including a statement like "I absolve you of your sins." Whenever the Gospel is spoken, it is effective and true. Hence, such an absolution is a real absolution and bestows God's forgiveness. See [the article](#) and especially the comments at Cyberbrethren.

[Some have claimed](#) that [the Circuit 8 Revision](#) of the ELS' doctrinal statement on the ministry denies the authority of individual lay Christians to speak God's forgiveness to their neighbors. A cursory reading of the Circuit 8 Revision shows that such a claim is either monumentally ignorant and careless, or slanderous. To wit, this is what the Circuit 8 Revision says:

Individual Christians also speak the Gospel of forgiveness to others, forgive the sins of those who sin against them, confront in a brotherly way those who need to repent of their sins, and in "the mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren" comfort one another with the words of the Gospel. This may be called the private or unofficial use of the keys. (1 Peter 2:9, Matthew 18:15-18, Matthew 6:12 -- The 5th Petition of the Lord's Prayer, SA Part III, Art. IV).

and

1. We reject any teaching that denies individual Christians the authority to speak both the law and the gospel privately in their calling as the Universal Priesthood of all Believers.

I realize that the Circuit 8 Revision has only a historical status in the synod at this point, but the inaccurate claims about its content have endured to the present. In fact, those claims have unfortunately and unjustly harmed the reputation of its authors.

It seems to me that the Circuit 8 Revision agrees with the points Pastor McCain has made in these blog posts. In fact, it comes closer than [the PMW](#) to recognizing that we use the word "absolution" in more than one sense.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Doctrine at 09:31