

FORUM LETTER

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Antidogmatism is a feature of the age

Inside this issue:

Is the brother restored? 4

Omnium gatherum 7



This brings us to the third and final point we must consider in relation to the interpretation of Scripture. Is it true that the New Testament invites us to engage in theological speculation and dogmatic construction? There are many who would argue that it does not. Protestantism, they say, maintains that the Scriptures contain everything necessary for salvation. They are the Word of God in a way that creeds and doctrinal statements are not. Christianity is the religion of a person and preaches a relationship with God based on mutual love. Yet doctrine sets up barriers and has caused untold harm to the body of Christ, by splitting it into countless fragments. 'The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life,' a Pauline statement which some have taken to mean that the true Church consists of men and women who have shared a common experience, can authenticate Christian experience in a convincing way. These attitudes are widespread in the anti-intellectual climate of today, so much so that even those who held to traditional beliefs are reluctant to suggest that an understanding of Christian doctrine is an indispensable aid to learning from the Scriptures.

Modern thinking of this kind appears to be a long way from the historical liberalism of the nineteenth century, but in fact it is very closely linked to it. The great liberals also believed that religion was a matter of feeling rather than the intellect, and were prepared to accept the superstructure of Christian worship and doctrine as a channel along which these thoughts could be directed. They propounded, with great learning, a thesis which has now penetrated to the popular level and become very influential, even in conservative evangelical circles. Antidogmatism is a feature of the age we live in, and it affects us all whether we like it or not. —Gerald Bray, *Creeds, Councils and Christ: Did the early Christians misrepresent Jesus?* (Mentor, 1984), 60.

NALC looks forward

by W. Stevens Shipman, Jr.



Those who think the North American Lutheran Church is either the "anti-gay group" or the "anti-ELCA group" would have been surprised or disappointed (maybe both) had they attended its annual Convocation in Pittsburgh, PA, August 8 and 9. This was the third time the NALC met by itself (not counting its constituting assembly in 2010), and more than 700 pastors and delegates (yes, delegates!) gathered for the occasion.

Sex was hardly mentioned, and a snarky reference to the ELCA was quickly and decisively deleted from a proposed resolution. Clearly the NALC is looking forward and not back. Lengthy mission presentations and a formal rela-

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tionship with the Navigators (a parachurch group dedicated to evangelism and discipleship) indicate where NALC intends to go. Delegates didn't wince when a floor motion asked them to set a goal of 1517 congregations by the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017. That is a stretch from the current total of 364, but don't count them out!

Bishop John Bradosky set the tone early, quoting Lucy from the comic strip *Peanuts*: "Recognizing your faults and actually changing your ways are two different things." He challenged the assembly "not just to clarify your values but to live them out," and declared that the pursuit of discipleship is "our area of greatest neglect." "Nothing will change until you do," he reminded them. "If Jesus has to choose between my comfort and my growth, guess which one he chooses!"

Ecumenical and missionary guests

The roster of ecumenical guests shows the emphases of the NALC. Two of the fastest-growing Lutheran churches in the world were represented. Dr. Wakseyoum Idosa, president of the Mekane Yesus Church in Ethiopia (with whom NALC has a "Partnership Full Communion Agreement"), brought greetings. A memorandum of understanding was signed between the NALC and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT), which establishes an interim relationship intended to lead into full communion.

Bishop Israel-Peter Mwakyolile of the Konde Diocese in Tanzania shared greetings from ELCT Bishop Alex Malasusa and preached at the festival Holy Communion service on Thursday evening. The Rev. Nolan D. Astley of the Lutheran Church—Canada (who also demonstrated his gifts as a stand-up comedian) shared a letter from Dr. Robert Bugbee, LCC president, saying, "we do not agree on every topic but have reached the point where we can listen respectfully to one another." Dr. Joel Lehenbauer, Executive Director of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations, commented, "You folks are doing just fine." He spoke of the "growing and warming relationship" that Missouri and NALC have with one another. "We need you and your witness to Christ and the Gospel and the world."

The Rev. Canon Daryl Fenton of the Anglican Church in North America, the Rev. Don Rooney

of the Roman Catholic Church, and the Rev. Dr. John Nunes of Lutheran World Relief also brought greetings. Pr. Marcus Kunz of the ELCA was introduced and welcomed to the convocation as well.

The Rev. Herb Hafermann, who served for fifty years as a missionary in Tanzania for the ELCA and its predecessors, led the Bible study on Thursday morning and then later reported on ministry in Tanzania. He is greatly loved by the Tanzanian church, but since he is more concerned with "pioneer evangelism" (calling people to faith in Jesus) than the "accompaniment" model of the ELCA (doing various and sundry good works), it was left to the NALC and the ELCT to honor him.

Tackling seminary education

Apart from elections, the major business item involved seminary education. A task force proposed that an NALC Seminary center be located at a currently accredited seminary, and that there be regional houses of study. The location for the center would be Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, near Pittsburgh, PA. Already a house of study is underway at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Charlotte, NC, and considerable local funding has been raised for it.

Bishop Emeritus Paull Spring immediately served notice that if the proposal were approved, he would move that the NALC also engage in negotiation with the Institute of Lutheran Theology in South Dakota and other independent seminaries such as St. Paul Lutheran Seminary in Minnesota.

Since the NALC is far more diverse than many outsiders realize, and since a part of its membership was involved in the debates over the full communion agreement between the Episcopal Church and the ELCA, locating the center in an Anglican facility raised significant questions. When one floor speech brought up this old ELCA battle, Bp. Bradosky pointedly reminded the group that "this church is not debating CCM" and warned against those who would use the memory of that issue "to divide us."

After a number of speeches pro and con, the previous question was moved and defeated, as there were still people lined up at both microphones. Later, when no more speakers indicated opposition, the Convocation overwhelmingly approved both ending debate and the proposal itself. This is the sort of mu-

tual respect which, under the leadership of Bp. Bradosky and his team, permeates the NALC. The delegates obviously wanted everybody with concerns about the proposal to be heard before they acted.

Mutual respect, patient listening

A similar issue surfaced last year over applying for membership in the Lutheran World Federation, a topic which has many similarities to the ELCA debates over ecumenical agreements. However, the way NALC handled the issue resulted in no congregations leaving over the decision, and nobody is arguing any more about it. Bp. Bradosky has set the tone in his own respectful and patient listening to differing viewpoints and his solid biblical and theological guidance. He consistently holds mission and outreach before the church, and does not permit turning inward against one another.

Even the choice of an executive staff for NALC brings together a team that embodies the diverse paths many took into the body. Their General Secretary, Pr. Mark Chavez, was a leader in the WordAlone Network; Dr. Gemechis Buba was on the ELCA staff and comes out of the vital Ethiopian church; and Dr. David Wendel is a long-time active member of the Society of the Holy Trinity. Yet these people are genuinely friends and colleagues, and the model of their leadership is defining the character of the NALC.

Independent Lutherans

Another sign of the nature of NALC is its relationship with independent Lutheran ministries. While the ELCA Churchwide Assembly the following week would have only two outside groups with displays (ReconcilingWorks and Lutheran CORE), the NALC convention had ministry displays from 40 groups ranging alphabetically from the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau to the World Mission Prayer League.

Of course the gathering provided more evidence that it is dangerous to put Lutheran pastors and a microphone in the same room. What should have been a quick and easy motion to authorize raising a million dollars for the NALC Seminary turned into a long series of speeches, most of which had little to do with the topic at hand. Eventually the motion was adopted, to the relief of the hungry gathering as the session went overtime.

Preceding events

The NALC Convocation was preceded by two other events. On Tuesday the Lutheran Coalition for Renewal (CORE; full disclosure: I am that organization's Director) met, heard reports, and re-elected steering committee members, while hearing from Dr. Gemechis Buba in the morning and from Pr. Steve Gjerde of Zion ELCA, Wausau, WI, in the afternoon. A panel discussion with pastors from NALC, ELCA, and Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ reflected on the presentation. Various workshops followed.

In order to provide more time for the NALC, which is constitutionally required to be a member of Lutheran CORE, the annual Lutheran CORE/NALC Theological Conference began on Tuesday evening.

Organized again by Drs. Carl Braaten and Robert Benne, the conference addressed the topic, "On Being the Church in These Precarious Times." Presenters, who came from several of the different Lutheran churches, largely heeded the advice to remember that there were many layfolk in the audience. A book will be published by ALPB with the presentations. The videos are online at lutheran-core.org, through the "Convocation" button.

Old home week

As one ELCA pastor described these events, "This is like old home week. All my friends are here." While attendance grew during the week from fewer than 300 in the Lutheran CORE Convocation to around 500 for the Theological Conference and over 700 in the NALC Convocation, there was a sense of freedom all week. While CORE and the NALC have their share of cranky saints still bitter (legitimately or not) over their ELCA experiences, on the whole most in NALC report that they feel liberated from battles they never wanted, so they can now pursue outreach and Biblical discipleship. NALC is made up of forgiven sinners just like every other church body, and surely they will have their challenges going forward. But their leadership has set an excellent course, and it will be hard to undermine the nature of the church now that people have tasted and appreciated it.

The events next year will be held in Charleston, SC, July 22-25. They are tentatively scheduled to be held at The Citadel, but conversa-

tions on its availability are not confirmed. The theological conference will focus on the authority and interpretation of the Bible. More information on this year's events can be found on lutherancore.org or thenalc.org.

W. Stevens Shipman, Jr., is a retired ELCA pastor, now serving as Director of Lutheran CORE. He has previously been our correspondent for different conventions and events. He and his wife live in Dillsburg, PA

Is the brother restored?

by Arnold Voigt



"Will law or grace prevail in 'the restoration of the brother'?" With these words *Forum Letter* concluded an August 2011 article on the case of Pastor Robert Stuenkel. To quickly recap the story, Stuenkel, a pastor in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, retired after 25 years as campus pastor at the University of Colorado in Boulder. Wounded by years of attack on his pan-Lutheran approach to ministry by fellow LCMS pastors, Pr. Stuenkel's wife Julie wanted peace and returned to her American Lutheran Church roots by joining an Evangelical Lutheran Church in America parish. Pr. Stuenkel, because of hopes for inter-Lutheran relationships and of family tradition, remained in the LCMS. The two, as a matter of faith, conscience and spousal commitment, commune[d] together at the altars of each other's parishes.

In October 2007, fellow pastors brought charges against Stuenkel, accusing him of "unionism" and "taking part in the . . . sacramental rites of a heterodox congregation," actions forbidden LCMS rostered workers [Article VI.2.b of the LCMS constitution]. The issue came down to how one understands the phrase "taking part in." Does that phrase imply a public participation, such as officiating in the worship service? Or does it also include a more private sense, attending and communing simply as a worshiper in a congregation?

A five-year struggle

Five years of ecclesiastical pressure ensued. In 2008 the LCMS's Rocky Mountain District President Randy Golter set a deadline for Pr. Stuenkel to cease communing in the ELCA or resign from the LCMS roster, "or I will seek to remove you." Sixteen colleagues in the Colorado Front Range interceded for Stuenkel's ministry and the deadline was temporarily lifted. Lengthy conversations followed. Stuenkel

prepared studies on church fellowship and the Lord's Supper, but Golter, using ELCA website statements and LCMS counterstatements, enlarged the debate to include homosexuality, elective abortion, and female ordination, all sins in his Missouri Synod eyes.

In October 2009, Golter announced he had asked the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) to explain the exact meaning of "taking part in" as it applied to an emeritus member of Synod. Five months later the CTCR responded that since "its potential *theological* meanings are varied, its particular usage . . . can be rightly decided only by . . . the Commission on Constitutional Matters" (CCM). Stuenkel only learned of this exchange when a friend pointed him to the CTCR response printed in the 2010 LCMS Convention Workbook.

In August 2010, after ten months of silence, President Golter called a meeting "to personally persuade you" and came with a letter which placed Stuenkel on restricted status (still on the roster but unable to function pastorally). The charge against him was amended somewhat, with his error now being described as "*regularly* communing" in an ELCA congregation. Stuenkel appealed, and a hearing panel in June 2011 upheld the suspension and then added that there were "other substantive issues." No indication was given what these issues were. That is where the 2011 *FL* article left the story; what has happened in the two years since then?

Parsing the words

In July 2011 Stuenkel followed up on the CTCR's decision that the CCM had to decide the meaning of "taking part in." He asked the CCM the same questions, including whether "unofficial reception [of communion]" in a non-LCMS congregation is prohibited for one on the LCMS roster. Five

months would pass before the answer came.

Meanwhile, on September 8, 2011, President Golter went back to the CTCR asking about the word “regularly” in communing at an ELCA altar. The very same day Synodical President Matthew Harrison imposed the following directive on the CTCR: “I hereby request that the CTCR provide a clear, brief and forthright answer (‘No’ would suffice) on whether or not it is proper for an LCMS clergyman to be communing at an ELCA altar.” Then he added, “This matter of course has to do with President Golter’s continuing challenge with a pastor in his district. I know the details of this case and know too that it has been handled with great care and pastoral concern. I support President Golter completely, and it is past time for all of us to support him and be clear about it.” Swiftly submitting, eight days later the CTCR responded: “[C]ommuning regularly . . . is unionism . . .”

In LCMS polity, supervision of pastors belongs in the hands of the district president, not the synodical president, and so one might think that Harrison’s pushing the CTCR to decide the matter in a particular way would be unseemly. But he continued to make public his opinion. At the Northwest District Convention in June 2012, President Harrison spoke openly about Stuenkel, “who has been pushing the envelope for some time” and is “creating considerable division within Synod.”

Christmas suspension

In December 2011, President Golter suspended Pr. Stuenkel. Stuenkel appealed, noting that the “CTCR could not answer . . .” and “CCM [is] still considering . . .” In February 2012, the CCM at last issued its answer to Stuenkel’s July 2011 question with Opinion 11-2598: “No, reception of the Lord’s Supper, by itself, does not constitute ‘[t]aking part in the services and sacramental rites’ of a congregation, as that phrase is used in Article VI, paragraph 2 b of the Constitution.” Further, “a district president (ecclesiastical supervisor) cannot use constitutional Article VI 2 b as the cause for an action to expel (Article XIII) a member from the Synod for simply attending worship, Holy Communion, a wedding, and/or a funeral in a non-LCMS church.” [emphasis in the original]

That seemed to settle the matter; Synod’s by-law 3.9.2.2 states, “An opinion rendered by the

[CCM] shall be binding on the question decided unless and until it is overruled by a convention of the Synod.”

Another hearing

In February 2012, a second hearing panel met to address the question of Pr. Stuenkel’s suspension. That panel asked the CCM what “weight or significance” a hearing panel should give to opinions of the CTCR or CCM. The CCM reiterated the bylaw provisions quoted above, which would seem to be quite clear both that simply receiving communion does not violate the policy, and that a district president cannot for that reason take action to expel a pastor.

But having considered this, the hearing panel upheld the suspension, but switched the basis from Article VI to Article XIII of the constitution. Article XIII provides for expelling members (not just pastors) “who act contrary to the confession laid down in Article II” or who “persist in an offensive conduct.” Pr. Stuenkel appealed again, and a third hearing panel was called.

Wrangling then ensued over President Golter’s effort to disqualify Pr. Stuenkel’s choice of panel members. More requests to the CCM resulted in the reinstatement of one and the disqualification of another. A special panel of three district presidents was drawn into the resolution of the matter.

Golter, meantime, term limited in his office as district president, had been brought to St. Louis to become director of the Office of International Missions. Yet Golter wanted to return as a witness against Stuenkel. Two weeks before the scheduled October meeting of the hearing panel, the attorney for the Rocky Mountain District requested a postponement because Golter was to be installed in St. Louis on the day before. Airline reservations had already been made for one of Stuenkel’s advisors. On Christmas Eve 2012, Pr. Stuenkel was given the new date of January 8 for the final hearing.

Decision not upheld

At the final [third] hearing panel, the accuser was the new district president, Allan Anderson, one of those from the Boulder area who had originally brought the fellowship matter to Golter. (The CCM had also ruled that the charges were being made by the office, not the person, so Anderson was now the accuser.) An attempt was made to recast the case: if

Stuenkel “will make a firm commitment” no longer to commune in the ELCA, Allen Anderson will drop the expulsion charges and reinstate him. Stuenkel refused, claiming it would be “a violation of my conscience.”

On February 7, 2013, the answer came: “The decision to suspend should not be upheld.” The panel held that “proper procedure was not followed by the district president” and “that the burden of proof under Bylaw section 2.14 and Article XIII . . . was not met.” Pr. Stuenkel was reinstated as a member in good standing, and President Anderson acceded to Pr. Stuenkel’s request and transferred his rostered membership to the Florida-Georgia District where the Stuenkels maintain a winter home.

Ramifications

But ramifications of the Stuenkel case continued to ripple out in the 2013 national convention of the LCMS. In his report to the convention [*Today’s Business*, First Issue 2013], President Harrison quoted a 2007 convention resolution encouraging pastors and congregations “who have established and practice communion fellowship contrary to the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions . . . to immediately cease such practice and return to a faithful practice and administration of the Sacrament of Holy Communion by practicing close(d) Communion.” He then recommended that the floor committee on Theology and Church Relations act in “bringing clarity to the issue of LCMS church workers communing in heterodox congregations, particularly in relation to Article VI of the Synod’s Constitution and a recent CCM ruling on this matter.” From that came Resolution 4-07, which concluded “WHEREAS, Because ‘communing regularly at the altar of a heterodox (ELCA) church body’ is ‘church fellowship with the adherents of false doctrine,’ such action is unionism . . . therefore be it *Resolved*, That rostered LCMS church workers shall not commune at ELCA altars.”

Harrison also instructed the floor committee: “We should have a mechanism whereby CCM opinions may more easily be reviewed and reconsidered by the convention. The Bylaws need to be changed specifically to state that unless CCM opinions are ratified by the convention, they shall have no enduring, binding stature.” The result was Resolution 4-09: “To Overrule Commission on Constitutional

Matters Opinion 21 ‘Interpretation of Constitution Article VI 2 b’.” This, of course, was the CCM ruling which overturned Stuenkel’s suspension.

Yet another twist

But then on the first day of the convention, the CCM issued a special report. Two weeks earlier Harrison had written the CCM formally asking the commission to “set aside or rescind the commission’s Opinion 11-2598 for the sake of the Synod.” In the special report the CCM acceded: it “suspends (sets aside application of) its Opinion 11-2598 until completion of the study mandated by 2010 Synod convention.” That 2010 resolution called for a study of Article VI of the constitution. The CCM will participate in that discussion. However, as one noted, it will be a CCM with new members. What opinions will issue forth from closed doors remains unknown. Those LCMS pastors deemed “aberrant” are still in Missouri’s crosshairs.

Will law or grace prevail? The final personal chapter in the Stuenkels’ five year ordeal has concluded. Pr. Stuenkel remains on Synod’s roster in good standing. The brother is restored. Throughout these five years, Stuenkel continually maintained that “reception of this means of grace is a matter of faith commitment and personal integrity for me.” The result, though, as he himself noted, is not one of grace, but of procedure and *realpolitik*: three formal hearings over five years, the involvement of twelve district presidents, literally thousands of dollars spent in a dogged pursuit of purity of institution, and a spirit of legalism untouched by grace marked the process. This was a contest representing the two poles of Missouri history and theology – the tension between the pursuit of perfection in church teaching and practice, and obedience to the gospel imperative of freedom from the letter of the law. This means that the issues raised and ably defended by Robert Stuenkel will have a struggle to remain at the center of a grace-filled witness in this era of Missouri’s history as an evangelical denomination in the Church Catholic.

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Omnium gatherum



Dang it • Ask not how the last page of the October issue got slightly skewed, with the little forum image thingy all by itself up in the corner. I haven't a clue. It was fine when it went to the proofreaders, so I can't blame them. It was just dumb luck that the page ended with a complete sentence, so chances are that not many of you even noticed, and you're now anxiously trying to sort through the piles on your desk to find out what I'm talking about. The mistake did cut off one final sentence, however, which was our usual plea regarding Christmas: "Give the *Forum* package to someone who needs to read it."

New publication • The first issue of the new *Journal of the Lutheran Historical Conference* is hot off the press, edited by Mark Granquist of Luther Seminary. It's got quite a few interesting articles in it, at least if your interests include American Lutheran history. Some are quite narrowly focused, such as Maria Erling's study of the Danish Lutheran Mission School for Indians in Oaks, OK. Others have a broader lens, including David Settje's study of Lutheran responses to the Watergate scandal. This is the successor to the former *Essays and Reports*, which restricted itself to papers presented at the LHC biennial conference. The new *Journal* will publish annually (at least), and will contain articles and studies beyond just the conference papers. It's a promising start. You can get it by joining LHC, and that can be done at their website at www.luthhist.org.

Gustavus changes • Some months back, I had a brief note about the discontent among some faculty and others at Gustavus Adolphus College over the administration of President Jack Ohle. There was a palpable sense of relief in those quarters when it was announced that Ohle will retire at the end of the current academic year.

Another follow-up • *FL* also reported that a former bookkeeper in the Northwestern Minnesota Synod of the ELCA had been charged with felony theft and check forgery. I haven't heard anything about how that one came out, but this seems to be going around in Minnesota. Here's another story that a

former employee of the Minneapolis Area Synod has admitted to embezzling more than \$300,000 from the synod over a period of some ten years.

Luther retirement • We've been following the financial crisis at Luther Seminary, which has been dealt with in part by some serious layoffs and by some decisions by senior faculty to retire sooner rather than later. It's been announced that Dr. Walter Sundberg, who has taught at Luther for more than thirty years, will hang it up at the end of this academic year.

Rest in peace • Perhaps you've heard the sad announcement of the death of Leonard Flachman on September 23 from lung cancer. Flachman had been a giant in the field of Lutheran publishing. He was director of product development for the old Augsburg Publishing House, and was particularly proud (and rightly so) to have been the managing editor of *Lutheran Book of Worship*. In the new regime, he was assistant to the president at Augsburg Fortress. More recently, he had founded and headed Kirk House Publishers and Lutheran University Press, both important independent publishers of Lutheran-oriented books. It is earnestly hoped that those publishing ventures will survive without Flachman's visionary leadership. *Rest eternal grant him, O Lord.*

Caring about ecumenism • If you missed the article "Reflections Five Years into Ecumenism" by Sarah Hinlicky Wilson in the fall issue of our companion publication *Lutheran Forum*, you should dig it out and read it. Wilson, who besides editing *LF* recently marked five years on the staff of the Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg, begins by admitting that she didn't really think this would be a very interesting job. "I wasn't anti-ecumenical before," she admits, "I just didn't care." There's a lot of that going around — always has been, of course, but the very success of the ecumenical movement makes it seem passé today, despite the continuing manifest disunity of Christ's church. Wilson's observations about the state of things ecumenical are judicious, wise, and thought-provoking. The article

would make a great discussion-starter at a local ministerial association or conference pastors group.

Respectful dialogue • A few months back I noted the election of John Henderson as the new bishop of the Lutheran Church of Australia (technically its first bishop, since his predecessors were titled “president”). The LCA doesn’t ordain women, and Henderson commented at the time that this isn’t “the big ticket issue, but many people have already moved on” after the church’s General Convention twice failed to approve a proposal to change its policy (most recently in 2006). Now, however, it appears that a lot of people haven’t really “moved on,” and so the subject is once again being put formally before the church. Australian Lutherans are being asked to “engage each other in deliberate and respectful dialogue” for the next two years, with hopes of a consensus emerging in time for the 2015 General Convention. Toward that end, the church’s website now includes a long list of documents to help facilitate the discussion, which you can find at www.lca.org.au/ordination-were-listening.html. Here’s hoping that the dialogue will, in fact, be respectful.

I feel rebuked • At the installation of Guy Erwin, the ELCA’s first openly gay bishop, Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson took as his text the story in Mark where Peter rebukes Jesus, only to have Jesus subsequently rebuke him (you know, the “Get behind me, Satan” text). Addressing Erwin, Hanson noted that he has been “rebuked for believing that God could call you to the ministry of word and sacrament and

to the vocation of marriage with your beloved.” “In your call to serve the gospel in the office of bishop,” Hanson continued, “we as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America are saying again and saying publicly and forthrightly, such rebuking shall not be what we as a church will be saying quite openly any longer.” The only way I can understand that is as a claim that the ELCA now disavows those who “rebuke” homosexual practice as contrary to Christian life and teaching. Apparently in his view the official statement of the ELCA which recognizes the “conscience-bound belief” of those who “are convinced that same-gender sexual behavior is sinful” is now – well, rebuked. (If you really want to listen to the sermon – which I don’t necessarily recommend – go to www.tinyurl.com/md9mz5v.)

On the other hand • Bp. Hanson began the aforementioned sermon by greeting the ecumenical guests. “We are only twenty-five years old as a church body,” he said, “but we said twenty-five years ago that we as the ELCA will first define ourselves on the basis of our relatedness in the Body of Christ, and not what sets us apart.” Those are pretty much the same words he spoke in greeting ecumenical guests at the 2013 ELCA Churchwide Assembly, the words that caused such offense to NALC Bishop Bradosky. I didn’t notice any NALC representatives at the Erwin installation, which seems to affirm my suggestion [October 2013 *FL*] that Bp. Bradosky seriously overreacted in Pittsburgh, and that Hanson’s words were not directed at him or his church body but were just the presiding bishop’s current ecumenical boilerplate.

– roj

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