

Feedback regarding the GCB and CoB report.

“Behold, how good and pleasant it is, when brothers dwell in unity!”

(Psalm 133:1)

Dear Fellow-Saints in Christ!

This is not a comprehensive response, just a brief reaction paper with some constructive suggestions regarding the possible future directions. It will consist of two parts: [1] a brief historical overview and [2] of two suggestion for the LCA future.

[1] A brief historical overview.

“It seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account.” The end of the 1980s and the beginning of 1990s witnessed the introduction of the Ordination Debate in the LCA. “Why can’t we ordain women?” Different views on the authority of the Holy Scripture and the influence of secular social justice and gender equality ideologies were around in the LCA already long before this introduction happened, but that seems to be the moment when the wedge of our current deep division was driven among the saints in our church.

It is not that hard to find that the ideas of ordaining both sexes didn’t come from some new discoveries in Biblical studies. They slipped into the Western churches from secular, and in many ways anti-Christian social justice movements that were battling for gender equality and fairness, of course, according to the secular understanding, accompanied with the denial of the differences between the sexes, describing marriages and families as patriarchal, oppressive and obsolete social structures and actively working towards their dismantling.

The embrace (probably largely unconscious) of these hostile to Christianity cultural influences, instead of allowing the Holy Scripture to shape our doctrine and life and thinking, could be described as the **root problem** leading to our current impasse.

The tragic turning point for the LCA was – to propose to look at these two different teachings as equally valid alternatives. It was similar to taking the secular understanding of relationships promoted by the culture and placing it next to the Biblical teaching on marriage and then exploring which one would people prefer; one comes from the world, another – from the Word.

For us as Lutheran Christians – that is not our way. Our way is described in the Article II of our LCA Constitution. But once this false choice was presented before the LCA, it became exceedingly difficult to deal with consequences and rising disunity.

Then another blow was struck. The spiritual leaders of the church, those who according to their very office were responsible for the teaching of the Church and rebuking of doctrinal errors, decided to go into the silent mode. That could be called the **root mistake**. The outcry of our fellow saints was and still is ascending asking to teach and guide them. The answer from our spiritual leaders was puzzling. They had

put on hold the very responsibility for which they were elected – to teach and preach and oversee the doctrine of the LCA, instead allowing every pastor and every layperson to make up their own mind. It was explained as an attempt to care for all.

One can understand the psychology behind such decision and attitude, when “to care” means trying to make everyone feel good and comfortable. But I struggle to see how was that “speaking the truth in love”? Even less, how was that exercising the doctrinal oversight, the very purpose of the office of then presidents, and now bishops? I can understand what was being done, and the seemingly good intentions why it was done, but I fail to see how was this acting in Christian love?

Nevertheless, by God’s surpassing grace, even when the new teaching was introduced as a valid alternative, even when the spiritual leaders had decided to keep silent, the LCA still remained focused on the Scripture, trying to tackle this issued as we should – searching the Scripture. Praise the Lord!

Even those who advocated for this new alternative wanted to find the justification for their positions in the Scripture. And as long as we kept listening to the Scripture, there was no valid scriptural argument found to justify the change of our current teaching. This reality became painfully obvious after the last synodical term.

Three years of deliberately marginalizing our current teaching and centring all the efforts on developing a Scriptural case that would justify the change of our current teaching, drawing on the best resources available, and yet as the result... a document, which even the Chair of the Committee chose not to present to the Synod.

Personally, I am not surprised that even after four [!] synodical NO! votes the question is back on the table again. That is exactly what I expected. I can understand the deep-seated reasons and motivations behind it, and that will shape my suggestions.

What concerns me greatly is that the current development can be interpreted as a departure from our Scriptural focus. It may look like the change of tactics, or worse, as the change of how we understand ourselves as the Church. In what way?

If it was impossible to introduce this new teaching justifying such decision with the Scripture, then, perhaps, an administrative route appealing to the desire for unity may be the solution? This is how the current efforts may easily be perceived – as transition from the Word-centred community to an administration-oriented institution.

I sincerely hope that such suspicion is not warranted, and that we all together are genuinely looking for God-pleasing solutions. With this hope, I would like to sketch two steps, which I have not seen explored yet, and which I believe could address both – the **root problem** and the **root mistake**.

[2] Two suggestions.

This is about building on the **Scenario # 2**. I believe it should be offered as the first and the preferable Scenario. Current Scenario # 1 sounds awfully close to Judges 21:25b. This cannot be our LCA way. Not confessionally, not constitutionally.

Scenario # 3 may sound appealing if/when all the other options to restore our Christian unity are exhausted, but I don’t believe that that is the case. Here I will

sketch out two specific suggestions/steps for how we could continue remaining faithful to the Article II and seeking true Christian unity.

Step # 1. Identifying and addressing the root problem.

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.” Or we could say – let’s ask the General Pastors Conference to examine our assumptions! The objections against our current LCA teaching, which are brought up again and again, and which seem to provide the motivation for the push of the new teaching, are that the current teaching perpetuates the discrimination against women, and doesn’t ensure justice and equality for both sexes.

If that was true, or at least if someone believes that is true – then it makes sense that faithful Christians would continue the battle for equality and justice and fairness for all people regardless of how many times they need to face the NO! vote on their way to victory. *If that is true...* But if that is true, then that would also mean that what Jesus and the apostles practiced and what the Holy Scripture teaches – is also unjust, unfair and discriminatory.

The question we would need to answer is this – **where do we get our criteria** to say that our current teaching (which is in continuity with what Jesus and the Apostles and the Church did and taught) is unjust and unfair and discriminatory? For there are no such criteria to be found anywhere is the Holy Scripture (or the Book of Concord) – which we as Lutheran Christians have chosen as our infallible source and norm.

Or are these criteria derived from other sources? Such as – popular and widely accepted contemporary ideologies and worldviews which in the name of justice, equality and fairness despise marriage and family, diminish and ridicule the callings of wives and mothers, promote abortions and unbridled sexual promiscuity as tools for empowerment of women, and also, by the way, mock and attack Christianity.

If it becomes clear that the criticisms aimed at our current teaching do not come from the Scripture, but are inspired by the above-mentioned sources, hopefully many would be assured that what the Holy Scripture reveal to us, namely, God’s design and ordering for His Church and for our lives, is indeed very good.

That all people are equal in their worth and dignity and all Christian are equally precious to our Saviour Jesus; that differences between men and women and our roles are not some social injustice or unfairness that need to be overcome, but the very good design of our loving Creator and Redeemer that needs to be appreciated and enjoyed.

It makes sense, that everyone should to be interested into making this Step # 1, for if we cannot put a finger on where our division stem from, how will we prevent the same happening again and again in future?

Besides, if even after examining the sources of our deep-seated convictions we cannot reach unity of faith in this matter, at least we will know that it is not our LCA’s current teaching or Biblical convictions that are to be blamed for our divisions, that the problem lies elsewhere. This leads to the second suggestion.

Step # 2. Correcting the root mistake and restoring the Church order.

Or we could say – teaching and preaching the Biblical teaching.

Once the Step # 1 is completed, then we should teach and proclaim the current teaching of the LCA in all its Scriptural depth and beauty, also explaining where the false accusations came from. Our spiritual leaders and overseers, our bishops, should lead the way, being followed by all the pastors who have vowed before God and His saints to uphold the teaching of the LCA.

Laypeople have been looking for guidelines to pastors and bishops for decades. Pastors have been looking up to the presidents and bishops. Unfortunately, so far, we mostly have responded with confusing silence. No wonder that ... Judges 21:25b.

I would suggest that with the same zeal and commitment as we spent three years trying to justify the new alternative teaching, now our bishops would joyfully take on their responsibilities and would teach the LCA winsomely and firmly the teaching that we have received and which we have promised to uphold and cherish.

We can be confident in doing it, for the 4th Commandment works. People listen to their leaders. Vast majority of our fellow-saints in the LCA look with trust and great respect to our spiritual leaders. If our bishops would boldly and confidently confess what the Word of God teaches about equality and dignity of both sexes, about unique gifts for men and women, and about the gift of the office of the public ministry, I have no doubt that people would listen and praise God for such godly leadership.

If you want to have a real-life example where it has happened, one word – Latvia. It happened in Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia. In 1989 the Synodical Convention voted to introduce the ordination of both sexes, men and women, motivated by the same equality-justice-fairness reasons.

In 1993 our current archbishop Jānis Vanags was elected, and he made it clear that he will uphold the Biblical teaching. In 2016 the Synodical Convention voted with 77% in favour of restoring the Biblical teaching on ordination as their official teaching. We seem to be much better placed.

May our Lord Jesus Christ grant courage and wisdom and Christian love to all our spiritual leaders, CoB and GCB, that they would not hesitate to preach and teach the whole council of God, for we can rest assured that the Word of God will not return empty. That is most certainly true.

I believe that if these steps are taken, our Christian unity in the one true faith can be restored and the Lord may choose to extend the season of grace for Lutheran Christians in Australia.

Yours in Christ's service,

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