

Dear Fellow Saints,

I would like to share a few thoughts **as reflections on our synodical convention.**

Part I.

We have this beautiful Article 2 in our constitution, where we accept the Word of God “as the only infallible source and norm for all matters of faith, doctrine and life.” But do we accept it? Do we practice what we confess? What I witness in the LCA leads me to conclude that the answer is “no, by no means!”

It seems to me that our greatest problem is that we don’t care much about the Word of God being the source and norm for what we believe and do. This is where all the other our problems come from. Sure, everyone would say that they believe the Bible has [some?] authority. But what else could be said? If someone would admit that for them the Bible has no authority, they would have excluded themselves from the Church.

However, there are different grades of authority. I can say that from my own experience. 15 years ago, when I made my first steps as a disciple of Christ, I understood the role of the Bible very differently.

You can have the Bible as your guiding or primary authority and then you ask the question “what does the Bible say about this or that issue, what should I believe or do?” Or you can have the Bible as restrictive or secondary authority and then you ask the question “is there anything in the Bible that would prevent me from doing what I already want to do [informed by my primary authorities]?” It is easy to see that these two are very different forms of authority.

I want to further suggest that our current problems have to do with our worldviews. For it is our worldviews that determine what our authorities are, what we listen and trust more, the Word or the world. And I would suggest that our current problems can only be solved on a worldview level. Our worldviews are “glasses” through which we see the world, they determine how we perceive it, and how we respond to what happens. And most people are blissfully unaware about their worldview assumptions.

So, for example. Many of the objections to male only pastorate this last week had to do with concepts of justice, equality, fairness, and other related terms. The question then is – how does one determine/know what is just, fair and equal? The answer is, – for each one of us it is done based on our worldview level assumptions and criteria.

If we practice the Art 2, Biblical worldview teaches that all human beings are created equal in their dignity and worth, regardless of their sex, equally valued and loved by our God, who wants everyone to be saved. Thus men and women are equal, but not the same, – with different functionality, complementary, with different gifts and different purposes as Gen 2 so beautifully reveals. (There are heaps of contemporary research confirming the accuracy of Biblical anthropology, thus we can say that Biblical anthropology is not only Biblical, but to a great extent also scientific.) In the

Biblical worldview the discussion on the office of public ministry is about God's very *good design*, about God's very *good order*, about *service* and about *reception of God's gifts* and blessings.

Different secular worldviews, which we saw and heard abundantly manifested during the synodical convention, have very different anthropologies, and consequently very different criteria for what is just and fair, and equal.

Thus, we heard feminist ideas, where equality is understood as sameness, and it can't be achieved unless women essentially became men. We heard cultural Marxist ideas, where men are oppressors and women are victims, and justice can be restored only by stripping those evil males of all their privileges. We heard postmodern ideas, where this debate was about power and dominion and control. And so on.

Consequently, for those who have embraced those different secular worldview assumptions this debate is about equality, and justice and power. They can't see it differently, for this is how they see the world and this is how they read the Bible. And as we witnessed such people can be and many truly are very passionate about what they believe, seeing the world (and the Scriptures) through their "glasses" shaped by secular ideologies.

The point I want to make is this.

The worldview level assumptions are deep and most of the time we are unconscious of them. Most people don't realize that these are assumptions that we have usually uncritically acquired during our lives. We are not conscious of where and when we picked them up. But we perceive this world and what is happening through these [as we witnessed last week – corrupted / non-Biblical] "glasses".

I would suggest that our problem in the LCA is not about exegesis, nor even about different hermeneutics, it is about fundamentally different worldview level assumptions and convictions which for many are shaped not by the Biblical narrative, but instead by embracing secular ideologies.

I don't think we can solve this confusion by arguing about certain verses in the Bible, we need to clearly identify and bring into spotlight our true problem – our deep worldview assumptions, shaped by anti-Biblical ideologies, and then to strive to renew our minds allowing the Word of God to form our beliefs and assumptions also on the worldview level. I think that this is where, if only possible, we should bring our discussion, both conversing with our brothers and sisters as individuals and trying to find our way ahead as the church.

Part II.

The other issue I want to bring up is also related with worldview level assumptions, but it expresses itself in our relationships. We criticized PSD (and rightly so), but I would like to suggest that we all to a certain degree have embraced the *modus operandi* that we so much despise in PSD.

Let me explain. I heard one of our PSD leaders in his presentation saying that “we must believe the victims”. I asked about what criteria we would use to establish whether there was a real offence or only an imaginary one, or none. And the answer was, – if the person FELT that way, that was considered as enough. I would like to suggest that we all are to a certain degree guilty of practicing this fallacy, and even worse — we often try to justify ourselves calling it caring for people. What do I mean?

Phillip Rieff in his fine book “The triumph of the therapeutic” described the emergence of therapeutic Christianity, where feelings are valued much higher than the truth of the Word. Our feelings become the ultimate organizing principle for our relationships, not the Word of God. It seems that that was exactly what we witnessed last week. But that was by no means an isolated incident.

Let me pick up the “eloquent” metaphor used by bishop David Altus. “The LCA as a broken woman”. I would like to suggest that the Biblical metaphor from Jeremiah 3 is much more fitting to our situation, even if it is not so touchy and definitely not so pleasant to our ears. But it also speaks about a certain kind of woman. (Read for yourself.)

We have our wonderful, and after the last week we could say – unbelievably faithful husband Jesus Christ, but we want to run around committing adultery with all the mighty idols [ideologies] of this world. Our loving husband graciously stopped us once more. And now we are upset and grieving for we didn’t get to commit the adultery that we wanted.

How would you counsel a 52 years young lady who has this wonderful and faithful husband, but she still wanted to commit adultery, but by God’s grace didn’t succeed and ... now she is upset and grieving. Repent, I believe it is the right word for us. Repent and return to your husband with fear and trembling so that He can heal you!

But what did we witness last week? A lovely lady at my table dared to suggest that this outcome was from Satan (for the 4th time!). So many were crying and expressing their utter unhappiness (at least as long as others were watching). So many trying to comfort those who by God’s grace didn’t succeed in committing this destructive adultery.

What I didn’t witness was the gratitude to God for He has spoken once more and has remained faithful to us even as we continue to lust after other gods. I didn’t witness the call to repentance for we have sinned against the Lord. It almost sounded like we needed to repent for we have continued to perpetuate injustice and oppression and so hurting people.

I think it was quite obvious that we have put feelings above the truth of the Word. We assume that everyone who feels upset has every right to do so. We have embraced the culture where subjective (and as in this case anti-Biblical) sentiment trumps objective truth of God’s Word. And by doing all of this we continue to confirm that the cause of

WO proponents is good and right, we continue to foster this sense of falsely perceived victim-hood, and the feeling that they have been wronged and need to continue the battle.

I participated in this. We participated in this. We have been guilty as well. We have been like co-addicts, or better co-adulterers. By affirming the wrong sentiment, we haven't been helping, we have only made things worse. Yes, we should be compassionate and caring, there is no question about that, and praying even for our enemies, but we should also exercise our Word and Spirit given discernment and not to displace our care and compassion thus making things worse. It is about speaking truth in love.

I confess (with a certain sense of pride) that I am a Latvian and therefore may not be getting all the cultural intricacies of the LCA. Guilty as charged. But I can't see how elevating subjective emotions above the objective truth, and subjective feelings above the Word of God as the organizing principle in our relationships could possibly serve the cause of the Gospel, or the unity of the church.

If by God's grace, immersed in His Word, guided and enlightened by His Spirit, we could address the above-described issues (what shapes our worldviews and how to relate to one another), that is my sincere believe, it could help us to recover and to be the orthodox church that we confess to be. That's my prayer for the LCA. And it seems we have been given a bit more time.

Richest blessings!

Always in need of repentance, your brother in Christ,

Guntars