

Questions for Bishop Burk Theology and Biblical Interpretation

- 1) Can you take us through a basic understanding of the historical-critical method of Biblical interpretation and how it differs from a more fundamental or literalistic interpretation of Scripture...our affinity diagram had consistent questions regarding how we view:
 - Whether stories in the Bible are true, including if Jesus said what the Bible says he said
 - What Bible passages do we hold as paramount in defining who we are as the people of God?
 - How do we interpret the Bible (including Bible interprets Bible issues) today?

- 2) The Lutheran magazine, the ELCA Study Bible, and the ELCA website all have references to universalism (references are attached/available). Each of these quote an ELCA seminary professor or Bishop.
 - In what ways is each of these entities (or other published materials that are endorsed by the ELCA) monitored for theological soundness/orthodoxy? Is there a system for this?
 - If these sorts of references appear in ELCA endorsed publications and are not removed, is it a fair assumption that the ELCA is in agreement with, or at minimum, is tolerant of these seemingly unorthodox theological suppositions?

- 3) There have been many references to ELCA seminary professors espousing unorthodox Christian positions including (references attached/available):
 - Jesus was not born of a virgin
 - That Jesus' resurrection was not physical
 - That Jesus' death was not for the purpose of salvation
 - That the Old Testament prophecies do not refer to Jesus
 - That Jesus was not divine.These questions result:
 - How does this church define orthodoxy and what it teaches in relationship to orthodox Christian beliefs?
 - What is the ELCA's relationship with our seminaries? What control, if any, does ELCA leadership have over what is taught in the classrooms?
 - If there are no parameters on the relationship, how does the ELCA maintain its allegiance to Lutheran confessions in what it is teaching its future pastors?

- 4) The ELCA is a full communion partner with the United Church of Christ. This means that we are able to share pastors and ministries as well as altar and communion fellowship with the UCC. The UCC has 20 churches which are also affiliated with the Unitarian Universalists Association (UUA) who invite their worshipers to "search for truth on many paths" (they include Muslim, Atheism, Buddhism, etc in that definition).
 - What is the basis for full communion partnership with other churches?
 - What happens if that church has affiliations with churches that have not only unorthodox beliefs, but also beliefs contrary to our understanding of faith?

- 5) An ELCA Church in California (Ebenezer/herchurch Lutheran) conducts a goddess rosary each week (www.herchurch.org). Prayers are offered to the Divine Goddess. Images of female deities (references available/attached) are present. The new ELCA hymnal has offered alternatives to the language of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and removed many references to God in any male pronouns.
 - What, if any, parameters are placed on churches in worship language? What is the process by determining whether a church may be practicing unorthodoxy?

- How would you answer the criticism that the ELCA is changing the doctrine of the Trinity in part based on changing the Trinitarian language?
- 6) ELCA missionaries have been told to “dialogue” with people of other religions and not to invite them to faith in Christ. This seems to be an apparent contradiction with Matthew 28:16-20 (“Go and make disciples of all nations”) and Romans 10:9-17 (“And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?”)
- Can you comment on your understanding of this ELCA practice?
 - What would prevent us from inviting people to faith in Christ?

More Questions for Bishop Burk

The next four questions may be considered in the category of social issues or in the “other” category, yet have some connection to Bible and Theology. If there is time, it would be good to hear the Bishop’s comments, but if time doesn’t permit, perhaps another visit from the Bishop could give us opportunity to dialog on these questions.

- 7) Called to Common Mission has been heavily criticized within the ELCA for the past ten years. It is an agreement with the Episcopal Church that lead to the formation of the Word Alone Network and other factions within the ELCA. Some within the ELCA have argued that requiring the historic episcopate contradicts the traditional Lutheran doctrine that the church exists wherever the Word is preached and Sacraments are practiced. Another objection is that adopting the Episcopalian priesthood and hierarchical structure was contrary to the Lutheran concept of the *Priesthood of all Believers*, which holds that all Christians stand on equal footing before God.
 - Can you comment on the objections above, given that Article VII of the Augsburg Confession states: “*And to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments.*”
- 8) A major concern for many within the church is how the ELCA was able to look at certain passages of Scripture regarding homosexuality which talk about it as sin in the Old and New Testaments, but then is interpreted as not referring to lifelong monogamous relationships. Many consider the Scriptural witness regarding homosexuality to be consistent and pervasive in both Testaments.
 - Please comment on how the ELCA views Scripture in the context of the CWA vote to approve lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships.
 - Please comment on how members of our congregation who disagree with that interpretation of Scripture may find a home in this church.
- 9) Our ELCA Bishop Hanson has issued several public statements regarding the current political situation in Israel. There are many who have viewed his statements as being pro-Palestinian or at least biased towards the Palestinian viewpoint of the situation. Attached/Available is the most recent statement and Pastor Fruhling’s response to the Bishop. There have been others similar in nature. Can you comment regarding:
 - The need for our bishop to make such public statements speaking on behalf of 4.5 million Lutherans
 - The seemingly consistent bias towards one side of this conflict...
- 10) Please describe the ELCA Board of Pensions policy on funding abortions, as you understand it, in light of the following ELCA statement on abortion adopted by a 2/3 majority at an ELCA Churchwide Assembly:

“This church recognizes that there can be sound reasons for ending a pregnancy through induced abortion.” Among such reasons they list threats to the physical life of the mother, cases of rape or incest, and the likelihood of fetal abnormalities. “An abortion is morally responsible in those cases in which continuation of a pregnancy presents a clear threat to the physical life of the woman.” <http://www.elca.org/SocialStatements/abortion/>

 - The ELCA lobby against the Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act has troubled those who feel this is inconsistent with our ELCA policy stated above. Can you comment on this?
 - Do you see an inconsistency with our ELCA Social Statement and 1) the practices of funding abortions through the Board of Pensions and 2) the practice of lobbying Congress in favor of Partial Birth Abortion?