

NB. These comments were written on the ALPB web site by Pastor Russ Saltzman, previously editor of Forum Letter.

“Pr. Sabin and others of gay advocacy, and certainly ELCA officials, now stress unity within the ELCA – unity and faithfulness. “Whether we agree about the actions of the CWA seems to me inconsequential,” writes Pr. Sabin, “when measured against the obligations we all have to our congregations, our communities, and our ELCA family.”

Winsomely said, and in normal circumstances, contesting normal issues - sure, no problem; I could do that. In fact I have. I’ve stayed with the ELCA.

But there are some questions and some issues and some contestations that demand something more than hanging around hoping things get better.

But this isn’t about sex, let me point out. I’ve said in print and in speech, as homosexual behavior goes, well, I’m rather of the opinion that poor stewardship and lax attendance at worship comprise greater sins. Nor is it homophobia, that great bugaboo of which I’ve been accused so many times I’ve lost count. My college roommate was gay, a great friend and a talented Episcopal priest (now dead fourteen years from AIDS). The first sermon I ever delivered outside of homiletics class was in his Cincinnati parish. It is an issue that has touched my family, as well, and in the ways of familial love has pretty much left us all untouched too.

But what is at stake is the very nature of the Gospel. The theological constructs required for revisionist sexuality constitute a different gospel. This new gospel relativizes the authority of Scripture – it becomes the source and norm of faith and life only insofar as it matches things in faith and life that suit our liking. It challenges the doctrine of creation, the intention of creation, moving us beyond “male and female made he them.” It tosses out the First and Third use of the Law as a guide for civil society and the formation of family and community, and as a guide for personal living. More, it says in the very first place the Law is wrong. It tells us that the Judaic/Christian sexual ethic on this point is merely an archaic relic, conditioned by times and peoples no longer pertinent to contemporary quests for personal sexual fulfillment – as if our own times are immune from cultural conditioning (or as more likely meant, we have been conditioned by a “better” culture). We have undermined the dialogic nature of Gospel and Law. When the Law no longer speaks, when it no longer names our sin in a fallen world, then to what may the Gospel reply?

The new gospel arrogantly declares this is the work of the Holy Spirit. Oh? If this is the work of the Holy Spirit, why is the Spirit speaking so distinctly to us but not to the United Methodists, not to the Presbyterians, not to the churches of Eastern Orthodoxy, not to the Church of Rome? Does the Holy Spirit speak differently to different Christian communities? On most essentials of

doctrine - salvation by grace, the sufficiency of Scripture, and the sacrifice of the cross - the ecumenical movement has taught us the Spirit speaks uniformly and with clarity. Yet in this instance, the Spirit has called us to do what 99.9 percent of the Christian churches will not do? Or is it a case that the other churches are deaf to the Spirit, and only we may be counted upon to hear what no one else is hearing, that we have become God's spiritual vanguard? And if this is as advocates have it the true work of the Holy Spirit, why have we made allowance for synodical and congregational options?

What we have done is anti-Gospel. I can't stay and fight any more. I am weary with the trumpeting. I do not know under what circumstances I will leave, nor when. And while I have no intention of abandoning my congregations, I no longer regard myself as a pastor of the ELCA. And with that conviction, well, the rest is just paper work."