

Lutherans could avoid disaster from their sexuality vote in August, but they probably won't

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On August 17, 2009, delegates to the biennial assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) will begin the first day of meetings in Minneapolis in the denomination's once-every-two-year national session to take up business. There are some who believe that the vote to be taken on the proposed social statement on *Human Sexuality* and the *Report and Recommendation on Ministry Policies* will cause a metaphorical train wreck that will cripple the ELCA and limit its effectiveness in its programs. Those concerns are reasonable and, based on currently-available information, rational.

In the interest of brevity, and at the risk of oversimplifying both propositions, the *Human Sexuality* statement says that Lutherans could and should tolerate, within their midst, people and/or other Lutherans who live in a same-sex lifestyle as couples who are monogamous and committed to each other. The *Report and Recommendation on Ministry Policies* says that that the denomination (ELCA) should not enforce sanctions against pastors who live with another person in a relationship which is monogamous and in which the participants are committed to each other—in the same way that people are committed to each other in a Christian and heterosexual marriage.

The upcoming vote in Minneapolis threatens to split the ELCA apart, no matter which way it goes. However, I think there's a way to avoid that split.

If every delegate to the ELCA biennial assembly would read just one book (I repeat, ONE BOOK), this problem could be solved in a heartbeat. And yes, there are those who now are thinking that the

referenced book is the *Holy Bible*, and that's a good guess, but it's not the right answer. The *Holy Bible* has been turned inside-out in the effort to find an answer to this issue, and (again, in the interest of brevity), that analysis is inconclusive. Hard-core literalists claim that the several passages in the bible citing homosexual behavior condone it as sin which should be stopped in its tracks; others (reflecting other respected schools of biblical interpretation which engage such concepts as linguistic criticism, historical criticism and textual criticism) offer a different viewpoint. God should be the ultimate arbiter of this apparently endless argument, but he (or she) hasn't yet provided the revelation with the clear-cut answer.

If every delegate to the ELCA biennial assembly would read Mel White's book, *Stranger at the Gate* (New York: Plume Publications, 1995), both propositions at the ELCA's 2009 biennial assembly would pass by an eight-to-one vote or better. And if all the members of Lutheran Core and Word Alone would read the book, their tolerance for the issue which the ELCA is trying to address would be enhanced substantially.

So, what is so special about Mel White?

He is a man with impeccable professional credentials. From White's website (melwhite.org):

For 30 years, Dr. White had served the evangelical Christian community as a pastor, seminary professor, best-selling author, prize-winning filmmaker, communication consultant and ghost writer to its most famous and powerful leaders. From the beginning the media pictured Mel as an employee of these leaders on the "religious right." Although Mel did not work with nor write speeches for these leaders, he was hired by national publishers to write books -- primarily "autobiographies" -- for his ghost-writing clients including Billy Graham, Jerry Falwell, D. James Kennedy, and Pat Robertson. Looking back Mel wishes he had never been a ghost writer "but at the same time," he adds, "it proves that God has a marvelous sense of humor. Seeing these leaders up close and personal gave me a priceless opportunity that would later be a real advantage."

There are a plethora of details—all positive—involving White's biography, but the bottom line is that he is neither a wingnut nor a promiscuous homosexual. He's a successful journalist and pastor and film-maker who has lived with another man in a committed relationship for what is essentially his entire adult life.

Unfortunately, that information isn't sufficient to convince the members of Lutheran Core or Word Alone to support the two resolutions. They need something more—something more persuasive.

Mel White provides that persuasive element. And here it is.

He has tried, in every way imaginable, to be heterosexual. The details are available in his book, and it would be redundant to repeat them here, but the empirical data are irrefutable. He tried everything, including electroshock treatments, exorcism and psychotherapy, to end up with a heterosexual orientation. Everything he tried failed. It didn't work. He was and is a homosexual, and his life turned out to be happy and fulfilled in a committed relationship with another man. There are those who will neither like nor understand those facts, but they are what they are.

So here's the question which must be asked of those theologians who insist that Mel White should be condemned because of his commitment to his relationship with Gary Nixon: Who are you to say that such relationships are wrong—or sinful? Is scripture that clear or that unilaterally prescient? Are Mel's efforts to resist his natural inclinations of no import? Isn't it clear that, within his very essence, his homosexual orientation is natural, especially in light of his extreme efforts to resist the feelings found at the core of his being?

Taking these facts into account, what would ELCA Lutherans possibly have to say to people like Mel White (and lesbians with their own natural inclinations) if the ELCA delegates voted (at the biennial assembly in Minneapolis in August of 2009) to reject both human sexuality proposals which speak to freedom, liberty, tolerance, and the human condition? Should there be a policy that gays and lesbians should be kicked out of the *communio sanctorum*, or should they be affirmed as recipients of God's grace like everybody else?

What does the church (or society, for that matter) have to fear from people like Mel White?

If you are a delegate to the ELCA biennial in Minneapolis in August of 2009, please read Mel's book.

And please, think for yourself.