

CHOOSE LIFE!

An Address by: The Most Reverend Walter Obare Omwanza, Presiding Bishop of The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya

Given to: The LWF Council in Jerusalem, September 2005

I have been summoned here today to answer the charge of “inappropriate interference in the life of a sister church” that carries with it “negative consequences for the unity of the LWF as a communion of churches as a whole.” My actions of 5 February 2005, where I presided over the consecration of Bishop Arne Olsson¹ of the Mission Province of the Church of Sweden, are termed inconsistent with my role as “advisor to the Council, entrusted with the responsibility to uphold and further the unity of the Lutheran communion.” I have been given the chance to “address the Council” if I so wish, presumably in the defense of my actions.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to explain what I have done and why I have done it. I do not wish to repeat many of the things that I have already written and publicly explained on this topic, but some repetition is undoubtedly necessary. Further, I do not only want to defend what I did, but to also make an appeal to the leaders of the Lutheran church worldwide, some of whom are gathered around this table. In many ways, this is yet another crossroads for the LWF where its drift away from historic Christianity can either continue or be arrested. Like Moses appealed to the children of Israel when he exhorted them at the renewing of the covenant, so I now exhort you:

*“I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore **choose life**, that you and your offspring may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days...” (Deut 30:19-20a)²*

Many believe that – like Bishop Olsson’s being cast out of the priesthood in the Church of Sweden – my own termination as a member of this Council is unavoidable. But, brothers and sisters, it does not have to be so! Episcopal tyranny and oppression concealed under what is ironically termed “unity” do not have to characterize the Lutheran church in our times. The pressure to violate one’s conscience found in the current policy in the Church of Sweden where those who disagree with women’s ordination are denied ordination does not have to continue. Such policies are not an expression of Christian “unity” or of Christian love! It is not the place of bishops to persecute those entrusted to their care, especially those whose confession of faith is fully consonant with the church catholic over the millennia and even up to today.³

¹ As a side note, Bishop Arne Olsson is indeed a bishop by any measure. His consecration is beyond doubt for many reasons that will be made clear below, but suffice it to quote Luther in the Smalcald Articles at this point: “Therefore, as the ancient examples of the church and the Fathers teach us, we should and will ordain suitable persons to this office ourselves. They may not forbid or prevent us, even according to their own laws, because their laws say that those who are ordained even by heretics should also be regarded as ordained and remain ordained.” (SA III, 10, 3)

² All quotations from Scripture are from the English Standard Version (ESV) unless noted otherwise, and those from the Lutheran Confessions are from the Kolb / Wengert edition.

³ It is well-known that the majority of Christians worldwide do not practice women’s ordination. The Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox and many Protestant churches in both the South and the North do not believe in this doctrine. Therefore, the doctrine of women’s ordination is a idiosyncratic teaching of a few liberal, Northern Protestant churches, and it is largely enforced through the domination of a powerful elite that brooks no dissension.

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I say this not for my sake or the sake of the Mission Province but for your sake. Whether or not I continue as a member of this Council is relatively unimportant for me. This is, at its heart, not a dispute over worldly regulations but a matter of doctrine and divine commands. As such, I am happy to follow in the footsteps of my Lord. But if the Council votes to remove me, then it is showing its true nature and rejecting the clear teachings of Scripture and the Lutheran confessions. Such a body would thereby forfeit its authority by siding with human regulations and oppression over divine commands and true freedom. The Council would then become complicit in a schism that was neither precipitated by the members of Mission Province who over and over expressed their desire to remain in the Church of Sweden without violating their consciences, nor by my own actions to help the oppressed people of God. Rather, the schism would be caused by those who believe in a particular ideology – the ordination of women (and soon the blessing of same-sex marriages and homosexual ordination) – more than true Christian love and unity. Brothers and sisters, let this not be so!

To this end, I would like to proceed to discuss three broad topics. First, I would like to put forward a biblical, confessional, contextual and missional theology of Christian unity and love. Note that there is no tension between any of these terms. Second, following Luther in the Heidelberg Disputation as well as the practice of the Reformers, I will strive to “call a thing what it is” by speaking frankly of the situation in which we are in today. Finally, I will address the question: “Where do we go from here?” and lay out a vision for the future.

1. Christian unity and love

“Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity.” (Ps 133:1)

It is surely impossible to briefly give a sufficient treatment of this topic. Therefore, I will only put forward in as short a form as possible the relevant teaching on true Christian unity and love.

The unity of the Church is given by God and not an achievement of human beings. In this sense, it is not wrong to say that the unity of the church is a sacramental unity, created by the Holy Spirit through the “washing” of God’s Word.⁴ As the Psalmist writes, “*Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.*”⁵ The church as God’s creation is affirmed in First Peter: “*Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*”⁶

This unity is a unity of faith; that is, faith in an object, namely Jesus Christ.⁷ The faith one professes is in agreement with the entire Christian church, as urged by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:10: “*I appeal to you, brothers... that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.*” The Reformers also saw the necessity of joining in a common confession when they wrote that the church is: “*the assembly of holy people [saints] who share in common the association of the same gospel or*

⁴ Eph 5:26 – a clear reference to baptism

⁵ Psalm 100:3

⁶ 1 Peter 2:10

⁷ Acts 5:14 () ; Gal 2:16 ()

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doctrine and the same Holy Spirit, who renews, sanctifies, and governs their hearts.” (Ap VII/VIII:8)

Christ joins His people, his children,⁸ together into one body, even his own body.⁹ We are told in no uncertain terms that, as one body: *“If one member suffers, all suffer together.”* (1 Cor 12:26)

To this body is given a multitude of gifts that are to be shared.¹⁰ Among these gifts is the gift of the pastoral office which is given to be sure that the Gospel is purely proclaimed among God’s people. The Reformers confessed: *“To obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel.”* (AC V:1-2)

Much more could be said, but let these points stand for our purposes here today. What should first be noted is that since Christian unity is a gift of God, we *recognize* it and do not *create* it. Luther, following the words of his Lord given in John 10:3-5 and 16, states what the church is: *“holy believers and ‘the little sheep who hear the voice of their shepherd.’”* (SA III, 12, 2) That is, the basis of the church is faith in Christ, a faith that comes to us as a gift and *recognizes* the voice of the shepherd that comes to us through his Word.

It is also possible to *recognize* the voice of the shepherd in the confession of a group of believers who are not personally known to you. This happened in Acts many times. Similarly, I was approached by the Mission Province of Sweden, and in their confession of faith, I, too, heard my own faith being proclaimed. I heard the voice of my shepherd in their voices. So I *recognized* fellow members of the same body, fellow Christians whose unity with me was given by God.¹¹

This is an important point. I did not by my reception of the Christians from the Mission Province create unity between me and them, my church and their church. Neither would my rejection of them have created anything but a superficial disunity. Rather, the unity was already there. It was a given in that God created the unity through our common faith in Christ and our common confession of that faith based on the Holy Scriptures.¹² All I did was *recognize* what was already there.

⁸ John 11:52

⁹ Eph 1:23; 1 Cor 12:12ff

¹⁰ 1 Cor 12:27-31. Other gifts include the gift of a bold witness to the truth of the Gospel and a strong missional faith. These gifts are given to the church throughout the world. Recently, an LWF press release dated 16 June 2005 referring to a meeting held in Reykholt, Iceland, stated the need for European churches to be challenged by churches in the South. According to the document, Rev. Dr. Kjell Nordstokke: “emphasized that the heartland of Christianity was no longer in Europe, but in Latin America, some parts of Asia, and in Africa. While churches’ membership in the South was increasing significantly, European churches were faced with a steady decrease. Mission could therefore no longer be understood as an activity decided by the North in view of the South. On the contrary, churches in the South needed to serve as an example for churches in the North. The South concepts should be understood as ‘gifts and potential, for our renewal as missional church in our context.’” As will become clear, my actions in Sweden were precisely for biblical, missional and confessional reasons. This is a gift to the Northern churches that can be understood in the context spelled out by this press release. But the result is that despite protestations to the contrary, the powerful elite in the North do not seem ready to accept the full weight of such gifts as we in the South could give. The press release is at:

<http://www.lutheranworld.org/News/LWI/EN/1686.EN.html>

¹¹ Cf. Acts 10:44-48

¹² Eph 4:5-6a; Ap VII/VIII:8

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Next, it became clear that these brothers and sisters in Christ of the Mission Province were being denied the gifts that God would give. They were being denied the gift of pastors to work among them who would proclaim the Gospel purely and rightly administer the Sacraments. This situation did not come about by their choice. The members of the Mission Province maintained a confession of faith fully consonant with the church catholic throughout the ages. Rather, they were being denied the ordination of their young men who met the biblical requirements for ordination because of novel teachings in the Christian church regarding women's ordination. This is a position that did not arise in Sweden until 1958. If a man does not agree to this theological position, then he is not a candidate for ordination.¹³ This contravenes not only the historic understanding of the Christian faith, but all normal canons of human social discourse.¹⁴ This is true because pressure is applied to candidates to go against their own consciences.¹⁵ Such heavy-handed tactics¹⁶ are denounced even among unbelievers!¹⁷ This insistence on the "litmus test"¹⁸ of agreement with women's ordination has nothing to do with Scripture or the Confessions. Rather, it is a humanly contrived episcopal regulation designed, through the use of ecclesial force, to propagate a particular ideology over against the historic confession of the church. In such a situation, it becomes a divinely mandated command to the church to ordain qualified men into the ministry: "*All this evidence makes clear that the church retains the right to choose and ordain ministers. Consequently, when bishops either become heretical or are unwilling to ordain, the churches are compelled by divine right to ordain pastors and ministers for themselves. Moreover, the cause of this schism and dissension is to be found in the ungodliness and tyranny of the*

¹³ When in such a situation, the Confessions are clear: "When the regular bishops become enemies of the gospel or are unwilling to ordain, the churches retain their right to do so. For wherever the church exists, there also is the right to administer the gospel. Therefore, **it is necessary** for the church to retain the right to call, choose, and ordain ministers. This right is a gift bestowed exclusively on the church, and no human authority can take it away from the church." (Tr 66-7)

¹⁴ At first, it was not this way. Promises were made in 1958 that the new regulations would not prohibit candidates who disagree with women's ordination from being ordained due to a "conscience clause". Minister Edenmann formally declared that the conscience clause would have the power of law behind it. But in 1982, the conscience clause was removed, and priests who disagreed with women's ordination were put under increasing pressure until the point was reached that they would not be ordained due to their opposition to this novel doctrine. See Tighe's article, "Swedes Adrift": <http://touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=16-02-036-f>

¹⁵ The confessions address the issue of ensnaring consciences: "Where, then, did the bishops get the right and power to impose such ordinances on Christendom and to ensnare consciences? For in Acts 15[:10] St. Peter prohibits placing the yoke on the necks of the disciples. And St. Paul tells the Corinthians [2 Cor. 10:8] that they have been given authority for building up and not for tearing down. Why then do they increase sin with such ordinances?" (AC XXVIII:42; but cf. 39-52) While the Confessors are speaking of ordinances that were created to earn God's grace or as being necessary for salvation, it can be argued that the insistence on the doctrine of women's ordination in the manner found in the Church of Sweden and the rhetoric surrounding the issue does indeed qualify as a human ordinance that is necessary for salvation.

¹⁶ "St. Peter prohibits the bishops to rule as if they had the power to force the churches to do whatever they desired. Now the question is not how to take power away from bishops. Instead, we desire and ask that they would not force consciences into sin. But if they will not do so and despise this request, let them consider how they will have to answer God, since by their obstinacy **they cause** division and schism, which they should rightly help prevent." (AC XXVIII:76-78)

¹⁷ William J. Tighe, comments: "Even a few liberal columnists commented on the absurdity of making support for women's ordination the *only* required belief for candidates for ordination or promotion within the church." [emphasis in original] <http://touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=16-02-036-f>

¹⁸ And it is a test. Extraordinary measures are used to verify that candidates accept women's ordination including the following: receiving communion from a woman priest; bringing a signed testimonial to this fact; and signing a document indicating acceptance of *all* clergy in the Church of Sweden and the validity of their sacramental actions. Men who are already priests are required to sign the same document and / or to administer communion together with a female priest. These heavy-handed requirements are inappropriate even in secular, civil society, much less in the church.

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bishops, for Paul warns that bishops who teach and defend false doctrine and impious forms of worship are to be considered accursed.” (Tr 72)¹⁹

Therefore, the context in which the Mission Province found themselves demanded, by divine right, that they ordain qualified men into the ministry so that the gift of Word and Sacrament ministry might be found among them again. But they did not want to throw away the good practices that have been established by human right, either. The practice of following the Apostolic Succession is not mandated by divine right. Rather, by human right, it is a good and beneficial tradition as an expression of the universal church. So instead of opting for presbyteral ordination which by divine right they could practice, they decided to follow both the divine command to ordain but also to express, by human right, the universality of the church by asking bishops within the Apostolic Succession to consecrate their own bishop who could, in turn, ordain pastors.

When the Mission Province wrote me of their plans and requested that I perform the consecration, I recognized their good desire. But at first I hesitated, asking “Why me? Why should I be the one to do this?” I then brought their request to my church who wholeheartedly agreed their proposal. Yet I still hesitated. I told the Mission Province that if two other bishops within the Apostolic Succession would agree to participate, I would do it. When three agreed, I decided that God was indeed leading me to be the one to help these persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ. In the end, Christian love compelled me to help. The divine command will not be thwarted by human regulations; God will free His people from their captivity. As Paul writes: “*When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.*” (Eph 4:8, NIV)

I have said before why I did what I have done. I presided over the consecration of Bishop Arne Olsson because Christian love and unity compelled me. The Word of God compelled me. The request came to me as a divine prerogative, and I followed in the footsteps of my Lord. This practice is also reflected in the confessions where Luther writes: “[*The bishops persecute and condemn those who do take up a call to such an office. Despite this, the church must not remain without servants on their account. Therefore, as the ancient examples of the church and the Fathers teach us, we should and will ordain suitable persons to this office ourselves.*” (SA III, 10, 2-3)

These actions were the result of obedience to the Word of the Lord. They were a clear confession of faith in Him. And their result is exactly and precisely an expression of true Christian unity – a unity that even reaches across continents. This contextually powerful, biblical confession by word and deed is also missional. It is missional because the

¹⁹ It is also possible to compare the situation in the Church of Sweden with those who, in the 16th century, insisted on the doctrine of the celibacy of the priesthood. Like women’s ordination, priestly celibacy was a novel interpretation of Scripture and tradition. Further, the practice of the Church of Sweden is mirrored in the persecution of the 16th century Roman Catholic Church toward those who objected to priestly celibacy. To this, the reformers said: ““Bishops could easily foster obedience if they did not insist on the observance of ordinances that cannot be observed without sin. However, they now engage in prohibiting both kinds of the holy sacrament or prohibiting marriage for the clergy; they admit no one to the ministry who refuses to swear an oath not to preach this doctrine, even though it is undoubtedly in accord with the holy gospel... [Our churches] ask only that the bishops relax certain unreasonable burdens which did not exist in the church in former times and were adopted contrary to the custom of the universal Christian Church... If however, this [tolerance] is impossible and permission cannot be obtained from them to moderate and abrogate such human ordinances as cannot be observed without sin, then we must follow the apostolic rule which commands us to obey God rather than any human beings.” (AC XXVIII:69-70, 72, 75)”

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proclamation of God's Word in its purity has been furthered in Kenya and in Sweden, and even unto the ends of the earth.²⁰

2. "Calling a thing what it is"

"A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross calls the thing what it actually is." (Martin Luther, Heidelberg Disputation, Thesis 21)

Rather than following the path of fidelity to Scripture and to the historic confession of the church, the Church of Sweden pursues the path of ecclesial tyranny and oppression through the enforcement of its humanly contrived rules and regulations. Rather than exercising true Christian love and unity, it fosters schism and controversy. Like true theologians of glory, the leadership of the Church of Sweden and other Northern, liberal churches insist on calling the bad good and the good bad. The LWF is not innocent of this charge. Let us examine some documents prepared by such theologians to see if this is the case.

- a. After receiving the request from the Mission Province to consecrate Bishop Olsson, Archbishop Hammar wrote a well-publicized letter to me that contained this excerpt: "Within the Church of Sweden there are many inner-church movements with different perspectives. Today, they exist side-by-side united by a wish to stay together even though there are different opinions regarding many of these perspectives. We seem to have reached the painful situation where the wish for some to stay together is no longer as strong as the need to stress one's own perspective."

The truth is that the Mission Province never intended to leave the Church of Sweden. They have always maintained their desire to remain as a confessing reform movement within the Church of Sweden (one of Archbishop Hammar's "inner-church movements"), not as a new church.²¹ Their desire for unity with a church that has

²⁰ Those who place confessional and contextual theology in tension are theologically muddled. An example of this is Bishop Hanson's address to the LWF Council in September 2004 when he says: "We will grow together and be strengthened as we hold in healthy tension and lively conversation ortho-praxis and orthodoxy, contextual and confessional theology." The same muddle exists when confessional and missional theology are contrasted. No tension exists between the terms. A truly confessional theology is both contextual and missional. The contextual and missional ramifications of a true confession of faith do, in fact, resonate around the globe as can be seen in such figures as Jesus, Stephen, Paul, Luther and many others.

²¹ Chapter 2 of the "Statutes for the Mission Province in Sweden" drawn up 17 May 2004 and amended on 15 January 2005 states the following: "The Mission Province is a part of 'the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church'. It is a free province of the Church and Congregation of God in Sweden, on the foundation of the unchanged Evangelic-Lutheran Confession. It stands in continuity with the spiritual tradition which has been kept and developed in the Church of Sweden, and regards itself as a non-territorial diocese in it." Further, in Bishop Olsson's appeal against being removed, he defines the Mission Province as follows: "The Missions Province is an inner-church movement, a free church structure within the Church of Sweden. It considers itself to be a non-territorial diocese within the Church of Sweden with its own bishops, priests and communion fellowships (often called koinonias). We work in the Church of Sweden's spiritual tradition with the belief, teaching and confession of the Church of Sweden as its basis. We want to be a missionary movement working for Christian renewal in Sweden. We want to be a prophetic voice, which takes God's word seriously; a reforming movement, which continues the work of the reformation. We want to be a refuge for those who have become more and more frustrated with the Church of Sweden because of its teaching against the Lord. From a legal standpoint, the Missions Province is a non-profit organization, its own legal entity. Therefore, our activity is not regulated by the Church Order, but by our own statutes. Yet, we see ourselves as part of the Church of Sweden in a spiritual respect. The Church of Sweden is seen as both a spiritual community, and as an organization. We see ourselves as part of the spiritual community of the Church of Sweden, but not as part of the Church of Sweden's organization. Therefore, we also desire good relations with the Church of Sweden as an organization. The Church of Sweden now has the opportunity to show its good will and affinity to us, by

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been persecuting their beliefs is remarkable for its commitment to both maintain their confession and the visible unity of the church. But what happened in point of fact? The Church of Sweden removed Bishop Olsson from her roster.²²

Which party is the one whose need “to stress one’s own perspective” overcomes the desire to stay together? Archbishop Hammar agrees that inner-church movements are possible, but when one comes along that does not fit in well with the agenda of the church leadership, it is kicked out. And this despite the protestations from the so-called “schismatics” who over and over express their intention to remain within the Church of Sweden! The good of maintaining the historic Christian confession of faith is no longer tolerated and is called bad. The good of desiring to remain united with the Church of Sweden in order to reform her is called bad. Nietzsche’s “will to power” expresses itself through the leadership of the Church of Sweden as regulations are used not to further the unity of the church but to splinter it. In the end, a particular ideological agenda seeks to crush all opposition in its quest for power within the church. My brothers and sisters, call a thing what it is!

- b. In Presiding Bishop Hanson’s address to the LWF Council in September 2004, he discussed diversity within the church when he called for: “Expansion of our understanding of ‘differentiated consensus’ and ‘reconciled diversity’ as theological tools for deepening conversation will help us to grow in unity without demanding uniformity.”

While the theological and logical confusion behind such terms as “differentiated consensus” and “reconciled diversity” is evident,²³ Bishop Hanson’s stated hope would be that churches could allow for different opinions existing within them. This is a very different goal than Paul’s “being of one mind”,²⁴ but let us look how this

withdrawing the Karlstad Cathedral Chapter’s decision to deprive me of the right to carry out my pastoral office.” The whole appeal can be found at: http://www.missionsprovinsen.se/engelsk/arne_olssons_appeal.htm

²² Bishop Olsson’s good desire comes through clearly in his appeal that he not be removed from the priesthood in the Church of Sweden: “The Cathedral Chapter has chosen the path of splintering and breaking. The Missions Province does not want splintering. We want to be an awakening- a movement of renewal within the Church of Sweden, a reforming movement, which continues the work of the Reformation. We want to be a prophetic voice, which raises God’s word in our times, to the people of our time. We love the Church of Sweden and have her and the people of Sweden best before our eyes. But we see no other way out than to ordain pastors ourselves when the Church of Sweden has placed itself in the way of the Gospel. This step does not demand that we split. On the contrary, it is with great concern and hurt that we are forced here. It is also for this reason, that I have not resigned my office as pastor. I want to remain a pastor in the Church of Sweden. This tie is important for me and for the Missions Province.” Again see: http://www.missionsprovinsen.se/engelsk/arne_olssons_appeal.htm

²³ Besides the “modern” Cartesian epistemological dilemma, there now also exists a powerful “post-modern” relativistic quandary. Much of contemporary theology is fascinated by claiming the validity of multiple, even contradicting assertions. Phrases such as “differentiated consensus” and “reconciled diversity” are indicative of this position. Much of it stems from existential philosophy (e.g., Heidegger and, in a modified form, Gadamer) that came into the Christian church via Bultmann where the goal is not so much to remain faithful to an unchanging, though adaptable, message (or promise) but to a certain “experience” of “authenticity”. This is a goal of philosophy, not Christianity. But even the way it has been imported into the church betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of the original philosophical intent which was not, largely, to be completely relativistic. Cf. John Milbank’s book, “Theology and Social Theory”.

²⁴ Compare the language of “differentiated consensus” and “reconciled diversity” with Paul: “complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.” (Phil 2:2) Rather, I wonder if such “smooth talk” coming from the LWF is meant to “deceive the hearts of the naïve”: “I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naïve.” (Rom 16:17-18)

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desire works out in practice to see if something more sinister is concealed behind these phrases.

The Church of Sweden fosters division and schism by its intolerant policy of not allowing priests to be ordained unless they agree with women's ordination. This is hardly an example of helping "us to grow in unity without demanding uniformity." Yet the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has done nothing to help alleviate the situation. From an African perspective, the reasons for this are likely to be because of the wealth and power of the church and the unwillingness of the LWF to honestly confront one of its wealthiest and most powerful members.

But weaker members are fair game. For my willingness to speak the truth to power and act on the biblical confession of faith, I face expulsion from the LWF Council. The Church of Sweden has already expelled Bishop Olsson for his plea for the tolerance of his position within the Church of Sweden. Apparently, uniformity is demanded, but it is uniformity to novel doctrines that have only arisen in the last 50 years of church history.

So what is concealed behind the terms "differentiated consensus", "reconciled diversity" and "unity without demanding uniformity" is something quite different from what they state on the face of it. Rather, these are expressions of the dominating will of a powerful elite who seek to enforce their ideologies on the rest of the church. They conceal with a thin veneer the "will-to-power" operative in the church today. We have watched this happen over and over in liberal, Northern Christianity. Liberal theological trends progressively take over, not in the congregations, but in the leadership. They become imposed through the "will-to-power" concealed in pleasant expressions like "differentiated consensus" upon the everyday Christian through the exercise of ecclesial dominion. Gentle sounding phrases become the weapons of a politics of exclusion that dominate liberal churches.²⁵ The exercise of this concealed "will-to-power" has crept like an assassin from church to church leaving many spiritual corpses in its wake. It is even, through financial enticements (a pleasantry I substitute for the term "bribe"), being marketed to Southern churches. This is at least true in Africa where it is not uncommon for money to be connected to the implementation of the liberal agenda.

But no more. Now is the time to say "No!" to this development. This occupation and domination of churches has hurt enough people. The intellectual and theological dishonesty concealed by this "double-speak" must end. Call a thing what it is!

²⁵ Ambiguity is another weapon used. Recently at the ELCA Churchwide Assembly held in Orlando 8-14 August 2005, members tried to clarify what language regarding "Recommendation 2" of the Recommendations on Sexuality really meant – would the blessing of same-sex relationships be allowed or not? No clear answer to this question was given except, as the press release stated, that they were: "avoiding the term 'blessing' in favor of pastoral discretion." When accused of being "wishy-washy" by not giving a clear answer to the question, Bishop Margaret Payne (New England Synod) said: "It's not that. It's very Lutheran. We live in paradox. That's different from wishy-washy. There is strength in understanding the reality of paradox and the variety of practices." Therefore, the ambiguity is deliberate and used as a tool to accept a non-biblical practice without really accepting it. How different this is from scriptural language! What happened to: "Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil"? (Matt 5:37)

For the press release, see: http://www.elca.org/scriptlib/CO/ELCA_News/encArticleList.asp?a=3140

For the text of the Sexuality Recommendations, see:

<http://www.elca.org/assembly/05/VotingMatters/RecommendationsRelatedtoSexuality.pdf>

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- c. Another theme in Bishop Hanson's address is standing up for the persecuted of this world. One example is when he says: "Have we accepted tolerance as the highest value in a pluralistic world, so that we refrain from condemning acts of injustice, violence and intolerance?" Once again, we see ecclesial "double-speak" rearing its ugly head. What I did in consecrating Bishop Olsson is exactly to condemn injustice, theological violence and intolerance of the historic confession of the Christian faith. And it is exactly for this that the LWF Executive Committee, of which Bishop Hanson is the chair, recommended that I be removed from the LWF Council.

A further example is Bishop Hanson's statement regarding the persecution of Christians: "Let us not forget that Christians and persons of other religions are experiencing persecution and discrimination. Our failure to speak out for an end to such actions will cause us to grow apart. We must reject violence in all its forms even as we work for peace and justice." In the context of the persecution of pastors holding to the historic confession of the Christian faith in the Church of Sweden, I have spoken out to end such actions. I have spoken by word and deed. This is for true peace within the church based on the Word of our Lord as well as justice. But, once again, the discriminatory practices of the Church of Sweden and Archbishop Hammar have not been censured, but the smaller, weaker Mission Province and I myself have been singled out for retribution. Is this just? Is this peaceful? Is this unity?

To paraphrase Bishop Hanson's own words I now say: "In the face of injustice, exploitation and violence, [I have spoken] words of prophetic judgment." Will anyone listen?

- d. Now let us come to the charges brought against me. The recommendation made by the Executive Committee reads: "The consecration took place outside all regulations in the Church of Sweden. This action, by Bishop Obare, together with those who assisted him, must be considered inappropriate interference in the life of a sister church, with negative consequences for the unity of the LWF as a communion of churches as a whole." This says that my actions were inconsistent with my role as an "advisor to the Council, entrusted with the responsibility to uphold and further the unity of the Lutheran communion."

These statements are filled with misunderstandings of what true unity is and of the basis upon which decisions should be made in the church. They are also hypocritical.

To begin with, unity is God-given, created by the Holy Spirit, and founded upon a common confession of faith as understood through the Holy Scriptures. The Lutheran Confessions help us understand the message of the Scriptures and are also an aid to unity. True Christian unity and love demands that injustice be addressed and Scriptural truths upheld. If this is not done, the message of the Gospel will be compromised in the short or longer term. This cannot be. So as stated above, Christian love and unity drove me to aid the Mission Province who sought to be faithful both to the divine command to ordain qualified men into the ministry and to the good human tradition of the Apostolic Succession. This interaction between the Mission Province and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya was one of the most beautiful expressions of Christian unity. It should be upheld as a model, where one church calls to another: "*Come over and help us!*" (cf. Acts 16:9)

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Yet this wonderful expression of the *una sancta* is termed “inappropriate” by the LWF Executive Committee. It is condemned because it supposedly violated “all regulations in the Church of Sweden.” First, it must be said that whether or not it was actually a violation of the regulations of the Church of Sweden is a matter of debate and interpretation.²⁶ The interpretation forwarded by Bishop Olsson and the Mission Province argues quite cogently that the consecration did not take place outside of the church regulations. But more importantly, should not the question the church be asking be: “Is what Bishop Obare did scriptural? Is what Bishop Olsson did scriptural? Is it in accordance with the way Lutherans understand the Christian faith found in the Lutheran Confessions?” But these questions are deemed unimportant for investigation. Rather, human rules and regulations are the basis for decision, even if these rules are not in accordance with Scripture and the historic understanding of the Christian faith.

Even more, the hypocrisy of the LWF Executive Committee is palpable. The LWF is an organization which is largely dominated by Northern, rich, liberal churches. That these dominant, powerful interests are now accusing a Southern bishop of “inappropriate interference in the life of a sister church” is hypocritical. Before going on, I need to state how grateful we are in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya for the mission work that was done among us by the Swedish Lutherans who God used to found our church. Their dedication and sacrifice is now bearing fruit – even thirty, sixty and one hundredfold – in that God is now using us to stand for the pure proclamation of the Gospel in Sweden and soon, hopefully, in other places around the world.

Even so, the Northern churches have a long, distinguished and ongoing tradition of “inappropriately interfering in the life of a sister church.” This interference takes many forms, but largely it is through the manipulation of the purse strings / the giving of funds. Money is to be had if you agree to the agenda set by liberal Northern churches. I, myself, was offered various “partnerships” by LWF “sister churches” if I would not consecrate Bishop Olsson. We have a word for this type of offer, a procedure that is, sadly, all too familiar to those of us in Kenya who have to combat the effects of graft daily.

Another type of interference is theological. An example of this is the consecration of a divorced, practicing homosexual man as a bishop in the Episcopal Church in the USA which has had wide-ranging effects on all Christian denominations throughout the South, and I know for sure in Africa. It has damaged the credibility of all Christians. The faith of new Christians or weak Christians has been badly shaken, and many have wondered if the Christian religion is the right one. It has also aided the outreach of the Muslims who use it as an example of the corruptness of Christianity. This is one theological example among many. The practices of liberal Lutheran churches in ordaining women, blessing homosexual unions (like the one in which Archbishop Hammar was present), and perhaps eventually ordaining practicing homosexuals are also terrible interferences in the life of Southern Lutheran churches.

²⁶ See: http://www.missionsprovinzen.se/engelsk/arne_olssons_appeal.htm for Olsson’s appeal and interpretation. It is interesting to note that the epistemological question that dominates much of liberal theology is absent here. While many liberal theologians claim it is impossible to know for sure what the Bible has to say to us today, apparently the interpretation of human regulations have no doubt attached to them.

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If this is not “inappropriate interference” that damages the body of Christ, I do not know what is.

Let me give you just one recent example of “inappropriate interference in the life of a sister church” from my own church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya (ELCK). A little over a year ago, a missionary pastor from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) planned and deliberately caused a split in what is arguably the most important church in the ELCK – Uhuru Highway Lutheran Church, now called a Cathedral. He officially tendered his resignation from the English service at the church two weeks before leaving. The Sunday after he left, he started preaching and began a new congregation also in Nairobi in an LWF “sister church”, the Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church (KELC). Before he had officially resigned from Uhuru Highway, this ELCA missionary had organized a steering committee for the new church he intended to found. He had started working on a new worship folder long before. The goal was clearly not to stay within the ELCK but to cause a painful split in the church. The official ELCA representative to East Africa was present at the steering committee meetings before the split occurred and helped to facilitate the split. The bishop of KELC also aided the schism. Over 6 months after the split occurred, the ELCA decided to contribute USD 370,000 (USD 185,000 over two years) to the new congregation thus cementing and guaranteeing that the split would remain permanent.

Yet I see Presiding Bishop Hanson of the ELCA as President of the LWF. I see no charges of “inappropriate interference in the life of a sister church” being leveled against his church body. I do not see Bishop Hanson’s position as President of the LWF in jeopardy.

My brothers and sisters, this is hypocrisy. Northern churches regularly “interfere” in the lives of Southern churches. This interference, like the discrimination of the Church of Sweden against her own members, passes by without comment because of the wealth and power of the churches. Is this what the church is about? Is this true Christian unity?²⁷

In the end, I do not accept that my own actions were “inappropriate interference” at all. They were driven, first of all, by Christian love and well-founded in Scripture and the Confessions. They were approved by my own church, the ELCK, in a resolution adopted at our annual general assembly. When I presented my reasoning at a private conference of about 17 African Lutheran church leaders [bishops and presidents] held during the 2004 Council meeting, they all expressed their support for my and the ELCK’s decision.²⁸ We did not approach the Mission Province; they approached us and we were merely reacting to God’s leading through their call to us. The Mission Province, unlike the ELCA missionary who split one of our congregations, repeatedly expressed its desire to remain within the church and not be schismatic. And, as mentioned earlier, the situation in which the Mission Province

²⁷ The situation at the church in Corinth is an interesting parallel to this. Rich church members were preferred to poorer, weaker members and some would eat their fill at the Lord’s Supper and get drunk while the other has nothing (1 Cor 11:17-22). It seems that little has changed in the history of the church.

²⁸ This is yet another example of the seriousness of the current North-South divide in Christianity. The Anglican Church of Kenya has withdrawn fellowship from the Episcopal Church in the USA due to their abandonment of historic Christianity. Similarly, the fact that 17 African bishops expressed support for my consecration of Bishop Olsson and that the LWF Executive Committee has condemned it shows a widening gulf within the LWF.

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found themselves necessitated, by divine right, that they ordain pastors which was accomplished in a very appropriate manner by following the Apostolic Succession. This is not “inappropriate interference”. It is rather the most appropriate “interference”, an “interference” fully in consonant with the commands of our Lord found in Scripture and explained in the Confessions.

I am sorry if my words have been harsh. But the truth must be spoken, and if speaking what Scripture says and exercising obedience to the Word causes dissension, so be it. As Jesus said: *“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”* (Matt 10:34-39)

3. Where do we go from here?

Brothers and sisters, do not make the LWF further complicit in these injustices and the persecution of the weak in the name of the strong. Because of the recommendation of the LWF Executive Committee, some may think that the decision is already sealed.

But it does not have to be so. The LWF can, in fact, stand up for the pure proclamation of the Word of God in the world. The LWF can hold to the Scriptures as the only norm of faith, doctrine and life.²⁹ The LWF can defend the weak who have been discriminated against by the strong. The LWF can maintain continuity with the historic understanding of the Christian church as found in the Lutheran Confessions. The LWF can look to divine commands and prefer them over human regulations. The LWF can change its direction and be a beacon of hope as a faithful servant of the Lord in the world.

But it takes courage. It takes resolve. It takes casting away the doubt that is so much part and parcel of the Northern intellectual tradition since Descartes. It takes holding on to the Word as the Word. It takes the heart of a servant, not of a master.

Serve the people. Give God’s gifts, most especially the gift of faithful Word and Sacrament ministry. Don’t submit to what is most normal in human history – the domination of one

²⁹ There has been a long, slow slide in theological thinking in the LWF and elsewhere. It is now common for theological decisions to not be based on Scripture at all but only on the will and desire of the theologian. Rather than sitting at the feet of the Lord, many seek to teach our Lord about how theology should be done. The epistemological question has so dominated liberal theology that almost any assertion is now accepted as valid as long as the person is sincere in holding it. See the ELCA’s “Journey Together Faithfully” and the subsequent recommendations of the Task Force on Sexuality in their FAQ: “People of differing convictions on these issues each in their own way rely on the Word of God as the basis for their views. Thus, there are sincere differences of interpretation among people in this church who share a common commitment to the authority of Scripture.” Like so many other statements, this one deceptively encourages the reader to believe that the authority of Scripture is accepted by the Task Force, but it is an ineffective authority because it can be interpreted so many ways. Yet one’s interpretation – sincere or not – can simply be wrong, and Scripture (or any coherent writing) cannot say “A” and “not A” at the same time. The performative effect of such language is to encourage doubt in one’s confession of faith. Is this what Jesus and Apostles sought to do? Or is it not much more similar to the goal of the serpent in the garden: “Did God really say...”

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over the other, the “will-to-power” that is concealed in so many theological regulations and catch-phrases today. Do not have “itching ears”.³⁰ Be open to God’s Word.

Brothers and sisters, I urge you to *recognize* the voice of the shepherd in my confession of faith and the confession of faith of our brothers and sisters of the Mission Province of Sweden. Both are well-founded on the Word of God and the Confessions. I am concerned of the consequences if you vote to remove me from this Council. I am not concerned for myself – my conscience is clear and my heart glad that I can stand near the same place where my Lord himself was tried. But I am concerned for you and the future of the LWF. So once again:

*“I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore **choose life**, that you and your offspring may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days...” (Deut 30:19-20a)*

³⁰ “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.” (2 Tim 4:3-4)