

## **Does The Holy Spirit Guide Our Conventions?**

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Recently I have been asked, “Does not God guide our conventions so that the decisions that are made are from the Holy Spirit?” I responded by saying that it is possible for a convention to make wrong and even wicked decisions. Did not Luther himself say that councils sometime disagree? Like our ELCIC constitution, Luther referred to the scriptures as our highest authority. Praying that God will guide our convention does not mean that every decision is of God. It must be tested by the scriptures. Besides, it is not always good that God gives us what we nag him for. Did not God give Israel a king against his will and to the detriment of his people.

In Acts 15 the Bible says that the Church gathered in convention. This is known as the Jerusalem Council. They addressed the issue of whether or not Gentiles had to keep the Jewish law in order to be Christians. The apostles and the elders were present. Every one had a chance to speak. They listened to each other. They shared testimony of what they saw the Holy Spirit doing. They referred to the scriptures, disputed, listened and prayed. Then they came to a decision that “...pleased the apostles, and the elders, with the whole Church...” A letter was sent to the churches saying, “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep from these, you will do well”. When they delivered the letter the churches “rejoiced”. This further confirmed that the council had correctly heard from the Holy Spirit.

We know what the Jerusalem council meant by “sexual sin”. The law was clear. Leviticus 20:13 states, “If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination.” Unlike many of the other ritual requirements of the law, such as the eating of pork, the sexual prohibitions of the Old Testament Law have been reaffirmed in convention by the apostles and whole church. Only recently and only in some parts of the church has that convention been questioned.

How is it that our little ELCIC convention can have the authority to over rule a convention that is recorded in scripture, a convention that represented the whole church at that time and gained its consensus? How can our ELCIC convention, with as little as 51% or even two thirds consent, overturn the prayerful decision of the apostles and still be able to confess the creed which says “we believe in the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.”? How can this even be considered constitutional? Was not the decision made once and for all 2000 years ago? Why does it have to keep coming up until one group can finally say, “God has spoken. Never bring up the subject again. When a man lies with a man as with a woman it is a blessing.”?

I am shocked that the Eastern Synod has seen it necessary to ask the National Church council for advising on this issue. I am outraged that the National Church Council has approved the consideration of this matter at our convention. I do not believe that our discussion of this issue at the convention will be a reflection of a church that is “One, Holy, Catholic or Apostolic.”