

CORE Connection

News from Lutheran CORE

July 2008

L CORE calls for major revisions to Sexuality Draft

Leaders of Lutheran CORE have drafted an Open Letter calling for major revisions to the *Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality* being considered by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

“The letter expresses the observations of several prominent Lutheran scholars and church leaders in a way that is accessible to all church members,” said the Rev. Paull Spring of State College, Pa., chair of the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee.

“We want to help members of ELCA congregations to be able to understand the significant theological issues involved in this draft and to be able to respond to the draft,” said Spring, the retired bishop of the Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod.

The Open Letter is signed by the 11 members of the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee and the 18 members of the Lutheran CORE Advisory Council.

ELCA members are invited to add their names to this Open Letter as a part of their response to the draft social statement.

Lutheran CORE also encourages ELCA members to submit a response to *Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality* by the November 1, 2008, deadline. A response form is provided in the draft document. A link to the ELCA’s online response form is available at www.lutherancore.org.

Links to detailed reviews of the draft statement and to other helpful documents on human sexuality are available at www.lutherancore.org in the marriage and family educational resources section.

Following is the text of the Open Letter:

**An Open Letter
to the Task Force for ELCA
Studies on Sexuality
and the ELCA Church Council
and Conference of Bishops**

As members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America — both pastors and lay people — we care deeply about the life and ministry of the ELCA. Because of our commitment to Christ and the Church, we cannot support the adoption of *Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality* in its current form. We respectfully request that the social statement that you recommend to the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly be significantly different from the current text.

We are grateful for the members of the Task Force who have given themselves to this difficult work for the sake of the Church. We realize that very different theological perspectives on human sexuality are represented on the Task Force and are present in the ELCA. Coming to agreement on language that would be acceptable to all must have been difficult. However, as a document

that will provide teaching and policy for the ELCA for years to come, a social statement on human sexuality must be more than acceptable, it must be faithful to the consistent witness of Scripture on human sexuality.

We are very supportive of portions of *Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality*. We support the affirmation of marriage as a lifelong covenant of faithfulness between one man and one woman and as the most appropriate place for physical intimacy. We appreciate the concern expressed about cohabitation, promiscuity, premarital sex, and our sexualized society and its many victims. We support the call for pastoral care and compassion for all people.

The ELCA Confession of Faith states: “This church accepts the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life” (ELCA Constitution 2.03). However, *Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality* distances us from our biblical heritage. We ask that you allow Scripture to be the *source* of the statement’s teaching on sexuality by moving clearly from biblical interpretation to practical application in dealing with issues of marriage, family, and sexuality. We also ask that you allow Scripture to be the *norm* of the statement’s teaching on sexuality by clearly affirming biblical

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ELCA members welcome to add names to Open Letter

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norms for sexuality and sexual behavior.

Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality confuses the role of Law and Gospel in addressing human sexuality. A social statement naturally flows from the Law. It describes God's intention for us and for society. God uses the Law both to order the world and to reveal our sinfulness. The Lutheran tradition places sexuality within the doctrines of creation and the Law. The draft attempts to place sexuality within the saving work of Christ, the Gospel. Incarnation and justification are key to understanding salvation, but creation and God's Law shape Christian understandings of sexuality and ethics. God uses Christ's birth, death and resurrection to provide salvation, but God uses creation and the Law — including Jesus' own teaching — to reveal God's intentions for sexual morality. We ask that you affirm human sexuality as a part of God's created order for the world and affirm marriage as God's intention for humanity "from the beginning of creation" (Mark 10:6-9, Genesis 2:24). We also ask that you affirm the role of the Ten Commandments in sexual ethics, especially the Sixth Commandment. We recommend that you rewrite the theological foundation for discussing sexuality in a way that acknowledges the role of God in shaping creation and the role of God's law in ordering society.

Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality rightly affirms that we are justified by grace through faith. We ask that the social statement you present in 2009 affirm that all are

sinners who are justified by grace through faith but also recognize that God justifies sinners rather than justifying sins. We also request that you note the difference between forgiveness and acceptance. God forgives sinners and accepts them, but God's acceptance of sinners does not mean that God accepts sins. We request that you maintain the relationship and order of the two great commandments from Jesus: love for God and love for neighbor (Mark 12:29-31).

Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality fails to acknowledge the Scriptural prohibitions of homosexual behavior in both Old Testament and New Testament. It also fails to recognize the 2005 ELCA Churchwide Assembly decision to "continue to respect the guidance of the 1993 statement of the Conference of Bishops" which clearly stated that "there is basis neither in Scripture nor tradition for the establishment of an official ceremony by this church for the blessing of a homosexual relationship." We respectfully request that you acknowledge both the teaching of Scripture and the content of Christian tradition regarding homosexual behavior.

Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality does not provide a helpful framework for members of the ELCA to consider areas of human sexuality. ELCA social statements are to provide a framework for ethical decision making by ELCA members. They must be written in a way that most church members can understand and apply to their lives. The 1996 ELCA Church Council Message *Sexuality: Some Common Convictions* is much more helpful. The 1996

Message and the social statements of the ELCA's predecessor churches explain matters of sexuality in a way that is both easy to understand and faithful. The ELCA would do better to continue to rely on these existing documents than to adopt the current draft. We suggest that you draw on these documents in significant ways in drafting the social statement that you will recommend in 2009. We ask that you draw content for the statement more directly from traditional Christian interpretation of Scripture and the Christian moral tradition.

We offer this response to *Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality* because of our commitment to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. We will continue to pray for the ELCA and for you as you work to draft a social statement on human sexuality that is faithful to Scripture and to traditional Christian interpretations of Scripture and that will guide the ELCA and its members for years to come.

**Lutheran CORE
Steering Committee**

**Lutheran CORE
Advisory Council**

ELCA members are invited to add their names to this open letter.

You may request that your name be added to this open letter by sending an e-mail with your name and address to info@lutherancore.org.

*You may also send your request to:
Lutheran CORE
2299 Palmer Drive, Suite 220
New Brighton, MN 55112*

Indiana-Kentucky Renewal Network reports progress

Members of Lutheran CORE are working for renewal throughout the ELCA. The Indiana - Kentucky Renewal Network — one of the member organizations of Lutheran CORE — has been making significant strides in its ministry in the Indiana-Kentucky Synod. Pastor Larry Gember reports on recent activity:

Bishop James Stuck and the Indiana-Kentucky Synod staff have been very fair to the newly-formed Indiana-Kentucky Renewal Network, which is under the Lutheran CORE umbrella.

One of our members, Pastor Tim Kraemer, is on the Synod Council. While those who share his views on reform seem to be in the minority, he was not afraid to ask the Council for permission to advertise the I-K Renewal Network at the June Synod Assembly.

We asked for “the works” — a booth outside the gathering room, a breakout session on the agenda, and the insertion of our brochure into the packet of ministry brochures.

We were told that we couldn’t have a booth because of the synod’s new policy, but this same policy also prevented groups like Lutherans Concerned from having a booth.

We were immediately granted permission to have our brochure in the packet. A week before the Assembly, we were informed that we could have one of the four breakout sessions scheduled during the lunch hour, which they advertised in print using our own description of who we are.

We scrambled to bring in a speaker and were graciously accommodated by Pastor Mark Chavez, who represented Lutheran CORE at the session. Mark did a terrific job of explaining the issues clearly and succinctly.

There were about 30 in attendance, and many expressed how happy they were to learn that there was a group out there trying to address their deeply held concerns about the future of the ELCA.

Subsequently, we have been receiving new members from the printed material we were allowed to distribute at the Assembly.

We are grateful to the Indiana-Kentucky Synod for allowing our voice to be heard. Bishop Stuck has not taken a public position, but he is not afraid to let everyone have their say on the matter.

Speaking personally, I know that some pastors in our network are afraid that their involvement with our group will result in some subtle retribution from the synod, especially in seeking calls. I can say, however, that I have just accepted a call after going through the process and experienced absolutely no discrimination from the synod. In fact, when a member of the church I was interviewing at called the synod, alarmed over my participation in Lutheran CORE, she was reassured that I was a very good pastor and that they wouldn’t have submitted my name if they weren’t confident in my abilities.

CORE Connection News from Lutheran CORE

Published monthly by

Lutheran CORE -
Coalition for Reform

2299 Palmer Drive, Suite 220
New Brighton, MN 55112

The Rev. David J. Baer, editor

editor@lutherancore.org

Please copy and share
this newsletter widely.

Support the work of Lutheran CORE

Lutheran CORE is grateful for your prayers and words of encouragement. As a grassroots organization, we are constantly looking to partner with those who wish to work together for positive reform in the ELCA.

You may support our efforts to work for positive renewal in the ELCA financially by sending gifts to:

Lutheran CORE
c/o WordAlone Network
2299 Palmer Drive, Suite 220
New Brighton, MN 55112

Please make checks payable to WordAlone Network and write Lutheran CORE on the memo line. You may give online at www.lutherancore.org. Contributions to Lutheran CORE are tax deductible as permitted by law.

We are grateful to the WordAlone Network — one of the member organizations of Lutheran CORE — for providing some administrative services for Lutheran CORE. This partnership enables more resources to go to our work together.

ELCA churches, pastors offer same-sex marriages

Some ELCA congregations and pastors in California began offering same-sex marriage services in June.

Lutherans Concerned / Los Angeles posted a list of nine congregations and pastors willing to offer same-sex marriage services to its web site, www.lutheranslove.com/marriage. The site also offers an e-mail address for same-sex couples wanting “a church wedding.”

Lutherans Concerned is one of the organizations asking for change in ELCA teaching and policy on same-sex sexual relationships.

The actions of these pastors and congregations are contrary to the official teaching and policy of the ELCA.

ELCA Secretary David Swartling responded to a request by California bishops for guidance on same-sex marriages with the following counsel in a May 27 memo:

“The constitution and bylaws, as well as related policy documents of the ELCA, do not provide a basis for pastors of this church to officiate at a same-sex marriage. Under ELCA policy, marriage is defined as a covenantal relationship between a man and a woman. The Churchwide Assembly has had opportunities to change this policy, both to make it less restrictive and to make it more restrictive. It has declined to do so.

“In light of ELCA policy, pastors, synodically authorized ministers, and congregations may be subject to discipline if they officiate at same-sex marriages and allow them to take place in their buildings.”

Lutheran CORE appreciates Secretary Swartling’s faithful interpretation of the teaching and policy of the ELCA. We lament that some pastors and bishops have been unable to uphold the clear teaching of Scripture and the teaching and policy of the ELCA.

The ELCA teaches that “marriage is a lifelong covenant of faithfulness between a man and a woman” (*Sexuality: Some Common Convictions*, 1996 ELCA Message).

The 2005 ELCA Churchwide Assembly approved by more than a two-thirds majority a resolution “that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America continue to respect the guidance of the 1993 statement of the Conference of Bishops.”

The 1993 Statement of the ELCA Conference of Bishops reads: “We, as the Conference of Bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, recognize that there is basis neither in Scripture nor tradition for the establishment of an official ceremony by this church for the blessing of a homosexual relationship. We, therefore, do not approve such a ceremony as an official action of this church’s ministry. Nevertheless, we express trust in and will continue dialogue with those pastors and congregations who are in ministry with gay and lesbian persons, and affirm their desire to explore the best ways to provide pastoral care for all to whom they minister.”

In spite of its clear rejection of the blessing of same-sex unions, some pastors and bishops have interpreted the last sentence of the 1993 bishops’ statement as permission to preside at

the blessing of same-sex unions.

In a June 13 letter, Bishop David G. Mullen and Bishop-elect Mark W. Holmerud offer this advice to Sierra Pacific Synod pastors regarding presiding at same-sex marriages:

“As pastors in the ELCA, we are expected to abide by the standards and policies of this church, and are not, therefore, constitutionally permitted to solemnize same-gender marriages. This does not mean, however, that you are prohibited from offering pastoral care to same-gender couples who seek the blessing of the church in their lives, a position that was affirmed in a 1993 statement by the Conference of Bishops.”

The synod encourages pastors to consult with the bishop prior to presiding at “covenant blessings.” Mullen and Holmerud counsel pastors “that, while neither of us may have intentions to bring charges for discipline against a pastor who chooses to solemnize a same-gender marriage, we cannot guarantee that other pastors or congregations will not choose to do so.”

Same-sex civil marriage became legal in California as the result of a May 15 decision by the state’s Supreme Court. In November, voters will decide whether to amend the state’s constitution to define marriage as between a man and a woman.

In 2006, the New England Synod Council approved “Guidance for Pastors and Congregations . . . Regarding the Blessing of Unions of Same-Sex Couples,” authorizing the synod’s pastors to preside at the blessing of same-sex relationships.

Anglican Communion leaders attempt 'rescue mission'

More than 1,100 Anglican Church leaders, including 291 bishops, representing 35 million Anglicans, gathered June 22-29 in Jerusalem for the Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON). In his opening address, Archbishop Peter Akinola of the Anglican Church in Nigeria described the conference as a "rescue mission."

"The Global Anglican Future Conference emerged in response to a crisis within the Anglican Communion, a crisis involving three undeniable facts concerning world Anglicanism," says a statement from those attending the conference.

✙ *"The first fact is the acceptance and promotion within the provinces of the Anglican Communion of a different 'gospel' (cf. Galatians 1:6-8) which is contrary to the apostolic gospel. This false gospel undermines the authority of God's Word written and the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the author of salvation from sin, death and judgement. Many*

of its proponents claim that all religions offer equal access to God and that Jesus is only a way, not the way, the truth and the life. It promotes a variety of sexual preferences and immoral behavior as a universal human right. It claims God's blessing for same-sex unions over against the biblical teaching on holy matrimony. In 2003 this false gospel led to the consecration of a bishop living in a homosexual relationship."

✙ *"The second fact is the declaration by provincial bodies in the Global South that they are out of communion with bishops and churches that promote this false gospel."*

✙ *"The third fact is the manifest failure of the Communion Instruments to exercise discipline in the face of overt heterodoxy. . . . Despite numerous meetings and reports . . . no effective action has been taken."*

In response to this situation, GAFCON participants formed "a fellowship of confessing Anglicans

for the benefit of the Church and the furtherance of its mission."

"Our fellowship is not breaking away from the Anglican Communion. We, together with many other faithful Anglicans throughout the world, believe the doctrinal foundation of Anglicanism . . . We intend to remain faithful to this standard, and we call on others in the Communion to reaffirm and return to it."

The statement also calls for a "Primates' Council" to offer "orthodox oversight to churches under false leadership, especially in North and South America."

This is the first of two major Anglican meetings this summer. Anglican bishops from throughout the world will meet July 20 - Aug. 4 in Canterbury, England, for the Lambeth Conference, an Anglican summit held once every 10 years.

More details on GAFCON are available online at www.gafcon.org.

Tanzanian Lutheran bishop reminds LWF of sexuality statement

Bishop Thomas O. Laiser of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania told Lutheran leaders from throughout the world that African Lutherans oppose change to Christian teaching on homosexual behavior.

Bishop Laiser reminded those gathered in Arusha, Tanzania, June 25-30 for a meeting of the Lutheran World Federation Council that in 2004 Tanzanian Lutheran bishops issued The Bukoba Statement, which affirmed traditional Scriptural teaching on sexuality and challenged those who would change Christian

teaching on same-sex sexual relationships.

"What is the witnessing and the stand of the LWF at the moment as (far as) the whole question of homosexuality and lesbianism is concerned?" asked Laiser. "It is an undeniable fact that this question is not even discussable, and therefore it is not acceptable."

Bishop Laiser expressed his opposition to efforts by some Lutherans to argue that those in same-sex sexual relationships should be "officials in the church in the guise of

human rights." He said the situation should be "mended" before it is "past mending."

ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson responded: "I do not think right now it's helpful for the LWF as a communion to take a stance on issues that are being discussed in the member churches."

There are more than 17 million Lutherans in Africa. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania has 4.6 million members — about the same number of members as the ELCA.

Biblical scholar reviews draft sexuality statement

A Lutheran biblical scholar has provided two important resources that will help ELCA members as they consider the *Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality*.

The Rev. Dr. Stephen Hultgren, an ELCA pastor and Assistant Professor of Theology at Fordham University in New York City, has written an Open Letter about the draft statement to the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality and to ELCA bishops. He has also written a review of the use of Scripture in the draft.

Both of the documents by Dr. Hultgren and links to other reviews of the draft statement and to other helpful documents on human sexuality are available in the marriage and family educational resources section at www.lutherancore.org. Following are portions of Dr. Hultgren's Open Letter:

✚ On the whole I find the statement flawed and disappointing. I believe that if the ELCA adopts the statement in its current form or in a similar form, the church will have missed an opportunity to speak a word of clarity to a church and a society that are deeply confused about human sexuality. More troubling, adoption of the statement will contribute to the continuing erosion of biblical authority that already endangers our church.

✚ The theological and ethical framework of the document is problematic. . . . The statement admirably affirms that what happens in and to the body matters for Christians, because it matters to God. . . . One misses, however, a clear affirmation of Scripture's grounding

of sexuality (and specifically of marriage) in God's creational intentions. Footnote 6 dismisses the idea of orders of creation and, amazingly, rejects creation as a framework for understanding human sexuality at all. Thereby it rejects explicit biblical teaching. . . . This use of Scripture is troubling, because it sacrifices Scripture's clarity on the matter of marriage for the sake of an unclear, abstract celebration of human sexuality in general.

✚ The document repeatedly emphasizes that a Lutheran ethic of human sexuality will seek what is good for the neighbor. Yet before I can do what is good for my neighbor, I need to know *what is* good for my neighbor.

✚ A properly Lutheran framework for human sexuality would begin by dwelling deeply in Scripture. It would present to the reader what Scripture has to say about sexuality *specifically*, that is, what it has to say about marriage, divorce, adultery, incest, prostitution, fornication, homosexuality, and so forth.

✚ The statement correctly upholds the biblical understanding of marriage, defined as a union between one man and one woman. Yet the statement would be significantly strengthened by showing that this is not just an isolated opinion in Scripture, nor is it mere custom, far less is it 'discrimination' against other ways of ordering human sexuality. It is rather the witness of Scripture as a whole, when Scripture is taken in its canonical coherence. Jesus affirmed the Old Testament understanding of creation and marriage, but he also clarified it. Jesus' teaching on

marriage sets the norm of monogamous, lifelong, heterosexual marriage, and so he brought clarity to what had been left unclear in the Law. . . . The Old and New Testaments *together* render a coherent understanding of marriage. (It must also be said that to reject the biblical understanding of marriage as rooted in God's creational intentions is to reject the words of Jesus himself.)

✚ In view of the statement's neglect of what Scripture has to say on specific matters of sexuality and in view of its focus on justification and love of the neighbor, it is hard to avoid the impression that the statement has been written in such a way as to exclude from the outset what Scripture has to say about specific aspects of human sexuality.

✚ If this statement will really set policy for the church, then it will commit the church, its pastors, and its bishops to policies on human sexuality that stand against Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, which the pastors and bishops have pledged in their ordination vows to uphold. That is unacceptable.

✚ It is my hope that the Task Force will rewrite the statement in such a way as to meet the criticisms made above. . . . The changes that would be necessary to bring the statement into closer conformity with Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions would require nearly a complete rethinking and rewriting of the theological and ethical framework of the document. . . . If the Task Force is unwilling or unable to make such changes, I call upon the bishops of the church, as teachers and guardians of the faith, to urge rejection of the statement.

Ethics expert evaluates draft statement on sexuality

Dr. Robert Benne, a Lutheran ethics scholar, has written a review of *Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality*.

Professor Benne is the Director of the Center for Religion and Society at Roanoke College, Salem, Va. He is the author of several books including *Reasonable Ethics: A Christian Approach to Social, Economic, and Political Concerns* and *Ordinary Saints: An Introduction to the Christian Life*. He also serves on the Lutheran CORE Advisory Council.

Benne's review, "A Sexual Ethic for Teletubbies, or Lutherans Embrace a Formless World," was published on the "On the Square" Blog of the theological journal *First Things*.

A link to his article and links to other documents on human sexuality are available in the marriage and family educational resources section at www.lutherancore.org. Following are portions of Dr. Benne's review:

✚ The kind of theological/ethical argument in this current document . . . is precisely the kind that will set the stage for a revision of Lutheran teaching on sexual ethics in the future. Such a revision would mean that the ELCA is no longer a church following in the footsteps of the Lutheran Reformation.

✚ One of the noticeably odd features of the new draft is its absence of "males and females," "women and men," "husbands and wives," "boys and girls," and "mothers and fathers." Instead, one reads of "couples," "partners," "engendered persons," "parents," and "children." The subjects of the statement seem to have no distinct features, a bit like the amorphous Teletubbies of children's

television. This reluctance to affirm definite forms extends to the statement's posture toward marriage and the family, commandments and law, guiding principles, and especially toward rules. In fact, this aversion to specific forms seems to be the fatal flaw of the document, leading to a vagueness and fluidity that undermines its capacity for genuine guidance in the church.

✚ This formlessness appears immediately in the statement's theological and ethical foundations. The law, though affirmed, remains a ghostly, abstract, and empty category. No commandments are mentioned. No covenantal structures—such as God's gift of marriage to Adam and Eve—are affirmed. Indeed, there is no explication of male and female together being created in the image of God.

✚ Certainly Jesus makes relevant statements about sexual ethics, but these have little to do with incarnation or justification. He reaffirms the creation account of woman and man being created in the image of God; he upholds marriage and offers very strict conditions for divorce. He condemns all sorts of sexual sins—adultery, fornication, lust, etc. But all these are built on the law of God he inherited from Jewish tradition, which gives the basic form and content to the sexual ethics he teaches and sometimes sharpens.

✚ This effort to derive sexual ethics from incarnation and justification is a very un-Lutheran way of making an ethical argument. Luther argued that marriage is located in the order of creation and should be guided by natural law, best summarized in the Ten Commandments.

✚ The statement clearly de-centers marriage as the touchstone around which Christian sexual ethics are elaborated. It takes up marriage as a topic only near the end of the document. It is even equivocal about the God-ordained status of marriage. It affirms that "Marriage is a structure of mutual promises between a man and woman blessed by God," yet later suggests that "marriage" (quotation marks in the original document) is accorded legitimacy merely by its "historic origin." It tepidly allows that this church "does not wish to alter this understanding" but then hurries on to dilute its affirmation by observing that some states already use "marriage" to refer to same-gender unions.

✚ The statement remains resolutely formless when it takes up family life. It grudgingly agrees that the nuclear family fosters the development of trust in children and youth, but immediately notes that it has not always done so effectively. Later it opts for a functional definition of the family and suggests that many arrangements can get the tasks done, not just the "conventional one." Its pastoral compassion for many in "broken" families overcomes the possibility of making a normative statement about the form of the family.

✚ The statement promotes an ethic of responsibility—a good thing for mature people—but distances itself from any reliance on rules, another example of aversion to form, in this case formalism in ethics. . . . A solid ethic of responsibility would employ rules, some absolute in character.

✚ The statement proposes a serious line of argument, a subversive one with which I sharply disagree.

Theologian critiques draft statement on sexuality

Prominent Lutheran theologian, the Rev. Dr. Carl E. Braaten, has written "A Critique of the *Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality*."

Dr. Braaten is Professor Emeritus, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. He is Senior Editor of *Pro Ecclesia*, the theological journal of the Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology. He is the author of numerous books including *Principles of Lutheran Theology*. He also serves on the Lutheran CORE Advisory Council.

A link to Dr. Braaten's critique and links to other helpful documents on human sexuality are available online in the marriage and family educational resources section at www.lutherancore.org. Following are portions of Dr. Braaten's review:

✚ This 'Draft' fails to apply traditional Lutheran principles of theology and ethics regarding human sexuality. In Lutheran doctrinal theology the articles dealing with creation and law precede the articles dealing with redemption and gospel. This is equally true of Orthodox, Catholic, Reformed, and Evangelical traditions of theology, virtually amounting to an ecumenical consensus from which this social statement departs.

✚ The ethics of sex is not primarily a gospel issue; it is a matter of law in the first instance.

✚ The common human structures of life such as marriage and the family, labor and the economic order, the nation and the state are universal dimensions of human existence. They are created by God and experienced

by all human beings and societies apart from the Scriptures and outside the covenant communities of Israel and the Church. The knowledge of what is right and wrong, good and bad, is revealed by God through these structures, by means of the way God has ordered them. No Lutheran theology has ever proceeded to deal with the matters addressed by the Ten Commandments (especially the Second Table of the Law) as though only Christians are endowed with moral discernment. In spite of the universal condition of sin, reason and conscience are not so depraved as to be incapable of grasping the universal morality expressed in the Decalogue.

✚ This social statement virtually ignores the Old Testament, the Genesis story of creation, God's covenant with Israel, and the giving of the Mosaic law.

✚ This document is worried about legalism. Some Lutherans are so afraid of legalism that they have thrown the baby out with the bath water. The root of the problem is confusion about the relation between law and gospel. . . . Legalism is not much of a problem in the ELCA today; antinomianism is.

✚ Over against Scripture the Draft refers to "society's changing circumstances and growing knowledge" as well as to "insights of culture and human knowledge." In the balance the latter clearly outweighs the former. If Scripture is really the "primary source" of Christian teaching, one would expect that its most relevant passages on human sexuality would be exegeted with extreme care. The most important verses are not even quoted.

✚ The social statement drops the ball on the issue of homosexuality. . . . One does not need to read the Bible to know by reason and conscience that homosexual behavior is against the norm of God's created order. . . . The basics of what is morally right and wrong are built into human nature. There is the law that male and female are created for each other; their sexual organs match. That is no accident; God created the sexes to complement each other.

✚ The Draft Statement acknowledges that there is a lack of consensus in this church on this matter. If there were not, there would be no need for the study and an eventual social statement. It is the obligation of the church to teach the biblical-Christian truth about faith and life, not to take a poll of its members and base its teaching on the outcome. . . . Should the church teach only those doctrines on which there is consensus? . . . Popular consensus is irrelevant. Some pastors and congregations may not conform their teaching to the Lutheran Confessions, and many do not, what does this prove? It proves that there is a high degree of tolerance of false teaching in the church and that discipline is lacking.

✚ This "Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality" is not only deeply flawed from a Lutheran theological perspective, it is also so poorly written that I believe there is very little in it to salvage. This document states that "this social statement on human sexuality . . . taps the deep roots of Scripture and the Lutheran witness . . ." However, in my judgment its treatment of both Scripture and Lutheran theology is extremely superficial and erroneous.