

CORE Connection

News from Lutheran CORE

March 2009

Lutheran CORE leaders urge rejection of proposed social statement and changes to ELCA ministry requirements

Leaders of Lutheran CORE (Coalition for Reform) have announced that they will work to defeat proposals that ask the ELCA to depart from biblical teaching on sexuality and to change its standards to allow pastors to be in same-sex sexual relationships.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America released proposals Thursday, Feb. 19, that seek to change Christian teaching on homosexuality and would permit pastors to be in same-sex sexual relationships. The proposals from the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality also go against the views of a significant majority of the members of the 4.7-million member denomination.

Lutheran CORE has released two model resolutions responding to the task force's proposals: One resolution calls for the rejection of "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust," as a social statement for the ELCA. Instead, it asks that the ELCA continue to rely on its current teaching documents on sexuality.

The second resolution asks for the rejection of the proposed changes in ELCA standards to permit pastors and other rostered leaders to be in same-sex sexual relationships. Instead, it asks the 2009 Churchwide Assembly "to reaffirm the ELCA's current standards for pastors and other rostered leaders."

A third resolution recommended by

Lutheran CORE asks that a two-thirds majority be required to change church teaching and policy to allow pastors and other rostered leaders to be in same-sex sexual relationships.

All three resolutions are available online at www.lutherancore.org. Resolutions must be proposed locally following the rules for each synod.

Lutheran CORE is a coalition of pastors, lay people, congregations and reforming groups that seeks to preserve the authority of the Bible in the ELCA. Lutheran CORE seeks to be a voice for the solid, faithful core that is the majority of ELCA members, pastors, and congregations.

"The task force recommendations mark a significant departure from the church's commitment to Scripture as the source and norm of its faith and life," said the Rev. Paull Spring of State College, Pa., chair of the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee. "The proposals make reference to Lutheran themes and Lutheran theology but forget one of its cornerstones: 'Sola Scriptura' (Scripture alone)."

"The proposal for change in standards for clergy departs from the clear teaching of Scripture," said Spring, the retired bishop of the Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod. "We intend to work for the defeat of the proposals for blessing and ordaining practicing gay and lesbian persons."

"We had hoped to work together with faithful Lutherans throughout the ELCA to amend the social statement. However, in considering the number of significant amendments that would be necessary, it became clear that it would be better to defeat the proposed statement and to continue to rely on the church's current 'Message on Sexuality' and the social statements of the ALC and LCA," Spring said.

"The task force recommendations will disconnect the ELCA from God's Word in the Bible, which clearly says that all sex outside of marriage is sin, and disconnect it from all who uphold the biblical norm — most ELCA members, and most of the Christian churches on earth," said the Rev. Mark C. Chavez of Landisville, Pa., director of Lutheran CORE.

"The task force wants the ELCA to take the same tragic missteps as other Protestant denominations in North America that have said same-sex sexual relationships are OK for some," Chavez added. "The membership losses in those denominations range from 30 to 50 percent. If the task force's recommendations are approved, the ELCA's membership losses, now more than 10 percent, will also climb."

"When any church finds itself accommodating its teachings to the

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Lutheran CORE leaders respond to task force recommendations

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ways of the culture, that church is in trouble,” said the Rev. Erma Wolf of Brandon, S.D., vice chair of the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee.

“In these documents the ELCA would accommodate itself to the demands of our culture that the desires and needs of individuals trump everything else. The exceptions become the rule, until finally there are no rules. That movement is happening in a number of areas, including human sexual relations. But no church has the authority to overturn the Word of God that protects sexual relations by placing them properly in the structure of marriage, and establishes marriage as being between male and female.”

The proposals neglect to offer any biblical and normative teaching on several areas of sexuality including homosexuality because there is no consensus in the ELCA. “Since when is consensus the norm for deciding what’s right and wrong?” asked Wolf.

“I am disappointed that the proposed actions lead us down the same road which is creating turmoil and dissension in so many of our sister churches,” said the Rev. W. Stevens Shipman, pastor of United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Lock Haven, Pa. “Every study indicates that a large majority in our churches and in our society do not endorse and cannot accept the blessing of same-sex sexual relationships. Even in California, the people have spoken, but a determined minority keeps thwarting their will.”

“God loves all people, and I oppose every form of discrimination. But I cannot ask God’s blessing on

behaviors which God does not bless, and I cannot accept a position that abandons the clear teaching of Holy Scripture,” said Shipman, secretary of the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee.

The proposals make much of the idea of conscience-bound positions by making reference to Martin Luther’s famous statement before the Diet of Worms in 1521: “Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason . . . I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise. Here I stand, may God help me.”

*“Since when is
consensus the norm
for deciding what’s
right and wrong?”*

“In its emphasis on conscience, the task force forgot that Luther was not talking about his right to his own opinion. He was declaring his commitment and allegiance to the Word of God,” Spring said. “It is exactly the opposite of the task force’s idea of conscience as one’s personal beliefs. They are encouraging the strange notion of a bound conscience as nothing more than individualism.”

“What these documents miss in talking about the bound conscience is that the conscience of a Christian is bound by the Word of God. This is especially true when that Word is

hard to hear, when God speaks against what we think is a really good idea. No matter how much we want to think otherwise, the Bible clearly says that sex outside of marriage is not a good idea,” said Wolf.

“What the task force is saying with its notion of the bound conscience is that there are no moral absolutes. They’re saying that what’s right or wrong is basically up to each individual to decide,” said Ryan Schwarz of Washington, D.C., a Lutheran CORE Steering Committee member. “If this is to be the teaching of the church, then how can I raise my daughters in the church and teach them what’s right and what’s wrong?”

The task force recommends “structured flexibility” be incorporated into the ELCA’s structure so that individual synods and congregations would “be free to act according to their convictions” in setting their own standards for clergy.

“The notion of respecting the bound consciences of ELCA members, congregations and synods is an impossible balancing act,” said the Rev. Scott Grorud, pastor of the 2,400-member Faith Lutheran Church in Hutchinson, Minn., and a member of the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee.

“These are proposals for organized chaos,” said the Rev. Paul Ulring, pastor of the 5,700-member Upper Arlington Lutheran Church in Columbus, Ohio., and a member of the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee.

“In the end the task force proposals

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Resolution Rejecting Proposed Social Statement and Affirming Current Teaching Documents on Sexuality

Following is the text of a model resolution for synod assemblies calling for the rejection of the proposed ELCA Social Statement, *“Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust.”*

The resolution notes that the ELCA is committed to Scripture as “the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life.” It also notes that the adoption of the proposed social statement would replace the ELCA’s current teaching documents on sexuality “with a document that is less helpful than its predecessor documents and distances the ELCA from Scripture and from the rich legacy of the church bodies that united to form the ELCA.”

Resolutions must be proposed locally following the rules for your synod. We encourage you to work with others in your area to bring this or a similar resolution to your Synod Assembly.

WHEREAS, the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly will consider the adoption of *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* as a possible Social Statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; and

WHEREAS, “Social statements and other resources on social concerns build on the rich legacy of the church bodies that united to form the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. As a confessional church with an historical sense, this church continues to look to the social statements of The American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church in America for guidance, while it develops its own social statements and further deliberates on social concerns” (*Policies and Procedures of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in*

America for Addressing Social Concerns); and

WHEREAS, the Lutheran Confessions state: “We believe, teach, and confess that the only rule and guiding principle according to which all teachings and teachers are to be evaluated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments alone” (*Book of Concord, Formula of Concord, Epitome, Rule & Norm*); and

WHEREAS, the Confession of Faith of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America 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*); and

WHEREAS, in addition to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, the current teaching of the ELCA on human sexuality is guided by the ELCA Messages *Sexuality: Some Common Convictions* (1996) and *Commercial Sexual Exploitation* (2001); and by the social statements of the ELCA’s predecessor churches: *Sex, Marriage, and Family - A Social Statement of the Lutheran Church in America* (1970); *Human Sexuality and Sexual Behavior - A Social Statement of The American Lutheran Church* (1980); and *Teachings and Practice on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage - A Social Statement of The American Lutheran Church* (1982); and

WHEREAS, the adoption of *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* as a Social Statement of the ELCA would replace the ELCA Message *Sexuality: Some Common Convictions* and the

predecessor church statements with a document that is less helpful than its predecessor documents and distances the ELCA from Scripture and from the rich legacy of the church bodies that united to form the ELCA; therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the _____ Synod Assembly thank the members of Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality for their work; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the _____ Synod Assembly memorialize the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly to reject *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* as a proposed Social Statement for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the _____ Synod Assembly memorialize the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly to affirm the teaching of the ELCA Messages *Sexuality: Some Common Convictions* (1996) and *Commercial Sexual Exploitation* (2001); and be it further

RESOLVED, that the _____ Synod Assembly memorialize the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly to express the ELCA’s intention to continue to rely on the social statements of its predecessor churches — *Sex, Marriage, and Family - A Social Statement of the Lutheran Church in America* (1970); *Human Sexuality and Sexual Behavior - A Social Statement of The American Lutheran Church* (1980); and *Teachings and Practice on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage - A Social Statement of The American Lutheran Church* (1982) — as historical documents expressing faithful Christian teaching on human sexuality.

Resolution Rejecting Recommendations on Ministry Policy and Affirming Current ELCA Policy

Following is the text of a model resolution for synod assemblies calling for the rejection of proposed changes in ELCA standards to permit pastors and other rostered leaders to be in same-sex sexual relationships.

The resolution asks the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly “to reaffirm the ELCA’s current standards for pastors and other rostered leaders.” The resolution notes that the ELCA is committed to Scripture as “the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life.”

It also notes that “a synodical or congregational option on ministry standards would represent a real change in the teaching of our church forcing even those synods and congregations that do not agree with this change implicitly to accept the notion that Scripture is not clear in its teaching about marriage or about homosexual behavior.”

Resolutions must be proposed locally following the rules for your synod.

WHEREAS, the 2007 ELCA Churchwide Assembly voted “to direct the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality specifically to address and to make recommendations to the 2009 Churchwide Assembly on changes to any church policies that preclude practicing homosexual persons from the rosters of this church;” and

WHEREAS, the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly will consider recommendations from the *Report and Recommendations on Ministry Policies* from the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality; and

WHEREAS, the *Report and*

Recommendations on Ministry Policies asks the ELCA to change its teaching and policy to affirm the possibility of same-sex sexual relationships for pastors and other rostered leaders in the ELCA; and

WHEREAS, the Confession of Faith of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America 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*); and

WHEREAS, many ELCA members and most Christian churches — including most churches in the Lutheran World Federation — believe that Scripture is clear in its teaching about marriage and homosexual behavior; and

WHEREAS, a synodical or congregational option on ministry standards would represent a real change in the teaching of our church forcing even those synods and congregations that do not agree with this change implicitly to accept the notion that Scripture is not clear in its teaching about marriage or about homosexual behavior; and

WHEREAS, the interdependent relationship between the churchwide, synod, and congregational expressions of the ELCA requires one Office of Ministry, one roster of pastors, and one set of expectations for pastors and other rostered leaders throughout the ELCA; and

WHEREAS, the ELCA currently expresses its expectations of pastors and other rostered leaders through

documents called *Vision and Expectations* and *Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline* which have served the ELCA well for most of its history; therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the _____ Synod Assembly thank the members of Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality for their work; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the _____ Synod Assembly memorialize the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly to reject the proposals in the *Report and Recommendations on Ministry Policies* from the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the _____ Synod Assembly memorialize the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly to reaffirm the ELCA’s current standards for pastors and other rostered leaders as expressed in *Vision and Expectations* and *Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline*.

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Coalition for Reform

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Please copy and share
this newsletter widely.

2004 ELCA Study: 57 percent oppose change in church teaching

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are synodical option by another name. As Lutheran CORE has already said, synodical option will gravely damage the ELCA," said Spring.

Lutheran CORE leaders wrote an Open Letter in December on synodical option which notes that "Synodical option is not a real compromise at all. Its adoption would force synods and congregations to agree that there are multiple biblical teachings on these matters. Synodical option would represent a real change in the teaching of our church. Even those synods and congregations that might not agree with this change would be forced by synodical option implicitly to accept the notion that Scripture is not clear on this subject."

"If the ELCA is to continue as one church, it must have one Office of Ministry, one roster of pastors, and one set of expectations for pastors and other rostered leaders throughout the

ELCA. Without a common roster of pastors and common expectations for pastors and other rostered leaders, it would be very difficult for pastors to move from one synod to another. Such an approach would effectively divide the ELCA into 65 separate church bodies — each with its own standards for clergy and its own clergy roster. The interdependent relationship between the churchwide, synod, and congregational expressions of the ELCA requires one standard for clergy throughout the ELCA," the Open Letter states.

The Open Letter is available online at www.lutherancore.org.

Responses to a 2004 study on homosexuality showed that a significant majority of ELCA members (57 percent) opposed change to accepted Christian teaching on homosexual behavior. Only 22 percent of ELCA members favored change in church teaching to allow for the blessing of same-sex unions or

the ordination of individuals in committed same-sex unions.

A proposal to allow bishops to grant individual exceptions to church policy to allow pastors to be in same-sex relationships was rejected by the 2005 ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

The ELCA Church Council will meet March 27-30 to decide the final form of the recommendations that will be considered by the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly (Aug. 17-23, 2009, in Minneapolis). Adoption of the proposed social statement requires a two-thirds majority. However, the Council is recommending that a simple majority be enough to change standards to allow pastors to be in same-sex relationships.

You can read the text of the proposed social statement and the task force's ministry recommendations at www.elca.org/faithfuljourney. The Church Council's recommendations will be available online on April 2.

Please support Lutheran CORE

Lutheran CORE is planning extensive ministry leading up to and during the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. We are counting on those who remain committed to the Bible as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of the Church's proclamation, faith, and life to continue to support Lutheran CORE as ELCA members must respond to those who are asking the church to change its teaching and policy on human sexuality.

Lutheran CORE is a coalition of individuals, congregations and reform movements in the ELCA. Lutheran

CORE seeks to be a voice for the solid, faithful core that is the majority of ELCA members, pastors, and congregations.

You may give online at www.lutherancore.org or send gifts to:

Lutheran CORE
c/o WordAlone Network
2299 Palmer Drive, Suite 220
New Brighton, MN 55112-2202

Please make checks payable to the WordAlone Network and indicate that your gift is for Lutheran CORE on the memo line.



**Lutheran CORE
Annual Gathering**

**Monday, April 27
3:30 p.m.**

Calvary Lutheran Church
7520 Golden Valley Road
Golden Valley, Minn.

www.lutherancore.org

When there are no biblical or theological grounds to change, don't

Dr. Robert Benne, director of the Center for Religion and Society at Roanoke College in Virginia, wrote this review of the proposed ELCA Social Statement, "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust."

Dr. Benne is a leading Lutheran ethics scholar and is the author of several books including "Ordinary Saints: An Introduction to the Christian Life" and "Reasonable Ethics." He is also a member of Lutheran CORE's Advisory Council.

The Statement and Recommendations of the Sexuality Task Force have been released, and they are as disappointing as I expected them to be, though the statement itself is much improved in some ways. It moves closer to the Lutheran way of doing Christian ethics as well as to the church's rich understanding of the centrality of marriage. Yet, the key problems remain: the statement avoids making normative judgments about homosexual conduct by neglecting the testimony of the Bible and the Christian moral tradition on that issue. In doing so it departs from the moral consensus that the church has held for millennia, a consensus that was reflected in the social statements of the predecessor Lutheran churches. We essentially will have no teaching at all on this matter. Yet, the Task Force moves forward anyway, violating the settled prudent conviction that there should be overwhelming evidence against a moral teaching and practice of long standing before it is changed. The two documents admit we have no consensus on that key issue but yet propose major changes in teaching and policies anyway. This is "journeying together faithfully?" This is more like "we respect your bound

conscience by adopting those policies to which you are opposed."

The "Bound-conscience" Doctrine

There are two erroneous judgments that anchor the statement. The first has to do with the "bound-conscience" doctrine that is so central to the documents. Both documents argue that we can have major differences in our convictions about central matters of faith and life and live with them as long as we sincerely hold different views of biblical interpretation and Christian doctrine.

*"The two documents
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This relativizes Christian teaching by appeal to sincerity. Luther did not doubt that his opponents were sincere at Worms, or that they held different views of biblical interpretation and church teaching. He thought they were wrong and he was right, on the basis of the Word of God and clear reason. Further, he appealed to the teachings of earlier authorities in the church in his debates with the Church of Rome at that time. He thought the weight of Scripture and authentic Church tradition was on his side of the tough issues of that day.

Likewise, I believe it is incontestable that the Scriptures and the moral teaching of the Christian Church

throughout the ages — and presently that of the ecumenical church — proscribe homosexual relations of any sort. (Conversely, I am quite certain that the revisionist side believes it is right and I am wrong.) Thus, I am not satisfied with appeals to sincerity and tolerance, especially since I think Christian teaching is clear. And I am certainly not satisfied with those appeals when the recommendations of the Task Force lead to no teachings at all on the subject, but yet lead to sharp changes in practice. Appeals to sincerity will not do. We may have to separate amicably rather than "journey together faithfully" since the right construal of the faith is at stake.

Another dubious facet of the "bound-conscience" doctrine is the claim that the revisionist side will respect the convictions of the orthodox or traditionalist side over time. Richard Neuhaus famously opined: "Where orthodoxy is optional, in time it will be proscribed." He hit the nail on the head. The revisionists already control the "commanding heights" of the ELCA — the headquarters, the Church Council, the majority of the Sexuality Task Force, most of the seminaries and colleges, the publishing house, and many Synods. They make sure that outspoken proponents of orthodox teaching on these matters do not disturb the near consensus they have forged. (If you keep quiet about these things, you may get hired or appointed, but you must remain quiet in order not to be shunned.) I have been in so many ELCA contexts where this process of selection has been at work that I don't have space to enumerate them. Let's just say that the most of the cards are held by those in the "commanding

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Proposed ELCA Social Statement demotes God's Law

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heights” and they will not respect those with orthodox convictions who might threaten their hand. And in time those orthodox convictions will not even be allowed to surface. This, by the way, has been the trajectory of those orthodox voices in the Episcopal Church. Finally, orthodox voices were so marginalized that they began another church.

A cynic might charge that the appeal to respect consciences is a convenient instrument to mollify those orthodox among the laity who are very upset by the moves being made. The revisionists do not want those laity to bolt the ELCA or send their money elsewhere. So the statements promise that their consciences will be respected. But beyond the congregational level, such respect will be hard to come by in a few years. Indeed, it already is.

The Demotion of the Law

While this draft definitely bolsters the role and evaluation of the Law of God — his commandments — in the first part of the draft, it forgets about them theologically and practically when the chips are down. First, Lutherans have always believed that the Word of God includes both the Law and the Gospel. Indeed, one could say that the full meaning of the Gospel includes the Trinitarian faith — the revelation of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Without the first and third persons of the Trinity, the Gospel of justification is either unintelligible or leads to cheap grace. The first part of the new draft does affirm the Law in principle, but when it comes to disagreement over what the Law commands, it says that such disagreement is not church-dividing.

This reduces the importance of the Law and makes agreement on justification the sole source and sum of our unity. “Thus, we recognize that this church’s deliberations related to human sexuality do not threaten the center of our faith, but rather require our best moral discernment and practical wisdom in the worldly (left-hand kingdom) realm” (*HSGT, Line 326*). Likewise, Task Force Chairman Peter Strommen states that “This ought not to be church-dividing, even if there are differences.” Stanley Olson, representing the ELCA, follows this line of thinking: “. . . Our Christian unity does not depend on agreement about ethical matters.”

“I am not satisfied with appeals to sincerity and tolerance, especially since I think Christian teaching is clear.”

This is quite a novel teaching. Would it be church-dividing if the ELCA suggested we alter the Sixth Commandment to allow adultery if the two spouses agreed upon the practice? Did the Lutheran World Federation allow the Apartheid-supporting Lutheran Church in South Africa “to journey together faithfully” with the rest of the Lutheran churches? If I remember correctly, denouncing Apartheid became a matter of *status confessionis*, and that little church was tossed out of the LWF. Did the Christians of the Barmen Declaration resist the Nazis because they attacked the doctrine of justification? Hardly. Rather, they resisted because the Nazis demanded that they violate the First

Commandment by recognizing the Nazi regime as a higher authority than God. Did the southern and northern branches of the Lutheran Church divide over the doctrine of justification during the Civil War? Indeed, did not the Episcopal Church split over violations of Christian moral teaching, something we Lutherans seem eager to imitate?

There definitely is a sense in which we can live with our differences when it comes to public policy. Lutherans live with all sorts of differences in social and political ethics. The left-leaning pronouncements of our Bishop and the ELCA in this realm are merely irritating, not church-dividing. Most agree that Christians of good will and intelligence can come down differently on the issue of recognizing civil unions in society. But the sexuality issues under discussion have to do with the teaching and practice of the church. They strike much closer to the core of Christian life and teaching — what does it mean to love the neighbor in sexual matters? What does it mean to confess Jesus as Lord in our personal life? Are the Commandments a guide in these matters, two of which assume the heterosexual nature of the marriage?

The demotion of the Law and the isolation of justification from repentance and amendment of life will not do. These disagreements are far more serious than the statement suggests. Further, as in the case of the Episcopalians, disagreement on the matter of the Law reveals other differences, especially on the authority of Scripture and the church’s tradition of moral teaching.

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A continuing problem: Aversion to form in Christian Ethics

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The Episcopal shipwreck had little to do with disagreements about justification.

A Continuing Problem: Aversion to Form in Christian Ethics

I complained about the formlessness of the first draft of this document. I called it an “Ethic for Tele-tubbies” because it refused to recognize formal principles in ethics: male and female forms, ethical rules, the Commandments, different forms of love, the created forms in which those different forms of love are properly expressed, and the God-intended forms of marriage and family. This statement bolsters that formal element by recognizing and explicating the Commandments of God as a guide for the Christian life (*Lines 204ff*) and extolling marriage as an institution established by God.

But, oddly, I believe, it relies on the concept of “trust” to make the case for right relationships in personal and social life. However, “trust” is not really a principle of moral guidance; rather, it is the quality in a relationship that arises when moral actions elicit trust. It is the proper actions and the guiding principles and intentions lying behind them that elicit trust. Trust is not the active principle but rather the response. Thus, love in its various forms elicits trust — the love of God for each sinner, loving actions among friends, between husband and wife, between parents and children, and so forth. But it is very clear in Christian ethics that different forms of love are appropriate to different forms of relationship. Erotic love does not and should not elicit trust if it is directed from parent to child. Such love is also forbidden for those outside the

marriage bond. Filial love is directed toward parents but does not include erotic love. The love of friends is of yet another sort. Agape love, the crown of Christian ethics, seems appropriate in all forms of relationships that need mending and/or mercy.

It is on this issue that the statement fails. By relying on “trust,” it avoids the Christian moral tradition’s distinctions about forms of love and their appropriate expression. The Bible and Christian sexual ethics throughout the ages prohibit sexual love with those who are too close to us (incest), those who are too different from us (bestiality), those who are too different in age and maturity (pederasty), and those who are too much like us (homosexuality). One part of that settled Christian moral consensus is now being challenged and that is a very serious matter, one that is likely to be church-dividing. (Logically, once the prohibition against homosexual conduct goes it seems unlikely that other challenges can be resisted. Trust can emerge in all of those forbidden relationships. It is the actions that are morally illicit.)

Further, in the long section on family life the statement seems unable to affirm the God-intended pattern of a mother and father bearing and nurturing children. It grudgingly accepts the “nuclear” family’s ability to “foster the development of trust in children and youth” (*Lines 727ff*), but it cannot bring itself to hold up that triad as the ideal for Christians. (By this I do not mean that we should be uncaring or unwelcoming of other forms of family, but in this confused world we should be able to impart a normative vision of what God intends for his creation.)

The statement also shows reluctance to employ rules regarding pre-marital sex. It relies on the principle that “degrees of sexual intimacy should be carefully matched to degrees of growing affection and commitment” (*Line 1005*). But that convenient principle leaves it up to the individual to decide the level of commitment present in a relationship. Does sex come with a promising relationship, with “going-steady,” with engagement, with living together, none of which are “non-monogamous, promiscuous, or casual?” (*Line 1012*) Fairly fuzzy teaching, that.

Likewise, the statement is pretty fuzzy on cohabitation. While “this church does not favor” cohabitation, it offers many reasons why it might be tolerated or even allowed. (*Lines 1045-1066*). It certainly muddles C.S. Lewis’ famous summary of the rule of Christian sexual ethics: “Complete fidelity within the marriage bond; complete abstinence outside it.”

Finally, how can a statement on sexuality avoid the issue of abortion, particularly when we will soon have legislative efforts before congress to strike down all limits on that practice? If men and women have sex, children are often the result. The classic Christian understanding of marriage is that it is a one-flesh union of complementary beings (man and woman); oriented toward new life; and a protection against sexual sin. This would have been a perfect time to offer a strong endorsement of the sacrality of all nascent human life, which should be taken only for the weightiest of reasons.

As they become available, reviews of ELCA sexuality recommendations will be posted to www.lutherancore.org.