

The Ordination of Women and Ecclesial Endorsement of Homosexuality: Are They Related?¹

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The August 2009 issue of *The Lutheran*, the official magazine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), carried two news items side by side. First was a column under the heading “Rite Sought for Gays,” reporting on requests from Episcopal bishops in six American states where same-sex marriages are now legal for permission to adapt their church’s prayer book for use at these weddings. Next was a report that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, at its General Synod meeting last June, voted by a wide margin to ordain women.² Are the two matters related—the ordination of practicing homosexuals and the ordination of women?

Over a decade ago, in 1996, Wolfhart Pannenberg shocked mainline churches in Europe and North America when he declared,

If a church were to let itself be pushed to the point where it ceased to treat homosexual activity as a departure from the biblical norm, and recognized homosexual unions as a personal partnership of love equivalent to marriage, such a church would stand no longer on biblical ground but against the unequivocal witness of Scripture. A church that took this step would cease to be the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.³

In the years after Pannenberg’s pronouncement, Lutheran churches in North America and Europe have steadily moved toward providing liturgical formularies for the blessing of same sex-unions and the ordination of men and women who identify themselves as gay or lesbian.

In North America, the ELCA, at their national assembly meeting in 2009, endorsed proposals that allow for both the ordination of homosexuals living in committed, monogamous relationships and

¹ The following article is a slight revision of a paper originally presented at the Lutheran Theological Conference of South Africa in August, 2009.

² *The Lutheran* 22 (August 2009): 16.

³ Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Revelation and Homosexual Experience,” *Christianity Today* 40 (November 1996): 37.

churchly blessings of such unions. The Church of Sweden has already had a woman, Eva Brunne, who has identified herself as a lesbian, elected as bishop of Stockholm on May 26, 2009. Furthermore, on October 22, 2009, the Church of Sweden voted to allow its priests to perform weddings for homosexual couples, who now enjoy marriage equal to heterosexual couples.⁴

Opponents see these moves as a clear and certain denial of biblical authority and an overturning of foundational moral truth, while champions of these changes see them as necessary steps for the sake of the church's mission. What is recognized by all is that change threatens the unity of the church. Those promoting change often argue that changes in church order to allow for the inclusion of homosexual men and women in the church's ministry are on the same level as previous decisions to ordain women. For example, Herbert Chilstrom, the immediate past presiding bishop of the ELCA, circulated "An Open Letter Response to the CORE Open Letter" in the summer of 2009, chiding several prominent theologians and church leaders for their inconsistency in affirming women's ordination but not the full inclusion of homosexuals in the ministry of the church. Significant voices, however, raised in support of the historic Christian teaching on sexuality insist that making provision for homosexual clergy and acceptance of same-sex unions is quite distinct from the question of women's ordination. For example, the ELCA New Testament scholar Craig Koester argues that to draw an analogy between endorsement of homosexual practice and women's ordination is flawed since the Scriptures are said to be inconsistent in their testimony to leadership by women but consistent in the rejection of homosexual behavior.⁵ A similar case is made by R.T. France⁶ and Robert Gagnon.⁷ This issue will be examined here demonstrating nine parallels in theological method and argumentation used to defend both practices.

⁴ "Sweden's Lutheran church to celebrate gay weddings," *Agence France-Presse* (AFP), October 22, 2009.

⁵ Craig R. Koester, "The Bible and Sexual Boundaries," *Lutheran Quarterly* 7 (Winter 1993): 388.

⁶ R.T. France, "From Romans to the Real World: Biblical Principles and Cultural Change in Relation to Homosexuality and the Ministry of Women," in *Romans and the People of God*, ed. S.K. Soderlund and N.T. Wright (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 234–253.

⁷ Robert Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 441–443.

I. Parallels in Theological Argumentation

1. The advocacy for women's ordination and for the ordination of homosexuals and the blessing of same-sex unions is put forth in the churches as a matter of social justice.

Church office and sexual fulfillment are seen as matters of entitlement. Just as barriers to women and homosexuals have been removed in other areas of civic life and the workplace, the same demand is made on the church. This is especially true in church bodies where social justice is seen not as a work of God in the government of the left hand but as a part, perhaps even the most important part, of the church's mission to the world. Here it is argued that the church must enact social justice in its own midst by removing barriers to equality. In fact, Krister Stendahl argues, "It seems to me almost impossible to assent—be it reluctantly or gladly—to the political emancipation of women while arguing on biblical grounds against the ordination of women."⁸

This was in large part the argument of Gustaf Wingren over against Anders Nygren in the Church of Sweden. Nygren argued against the move to ordain women in Sweden in 1958. After the decision was made to allow for the ordination of women, Nygren and others still protested. In 1974, Wingren resigned the pastoral office in protest of what he saw as a social justice issue in the resistance to female clergy.⁹

2. Churchly acceptance of women's ordination, the ordination of homosexuals, and the blessing of same-sex unions has been fueled by powerful liberationist movements within the culture rather than by biblical understanding.

Feminism had its roots in nineteenth-century egalitarian impulses that promoted social change. Many of the first women who would be seen as matriarchs of what might be more specifically identified as "feminist theology" were shaped by nineteenth-century American revivalism.¹⁰ While feminist theologies exist in great variety,¹¹ they share a common,

⁸ *The Bible and the Role of Women: A Case Study in Hermeneutics*, trans. Emilie T. Sander (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 39.

⁹ See Carl Axel Aurelius, "Wingren, Gustaf (1910–2000)," in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, Band 36 (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 110. Also see Mary Elizabeth Anderson, "Gustaf Wingren (1910–2000)," *Lutheran Quarterly* 23 (Summer 2009): 198–217.

¹⁰ See Melanie May, "Feminist Theology," in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 305.

¹¹ For a helpful survey, see Hans Schwarz, *Theology in a Global Context: The Last Two Hundred Years* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 487–500, and Roland F. Ziegler, "Liberation Theology in the Leading Ladies of Feminist Theology," in *Women Pastors?*

strong theme that women are oppressed by patriarchal structures and need to be emancipated from these restrictive, ideological paradigms and freed for access to all aspects of church life, including the pastoral office. While various gay liberationist movements are historically much more recent than feminism, they tend to have similar goals. For example, "Lutherans Concerned," a North American group, works for full inclusion of gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, and transgendered persons in the life of the church, that is, ordination and the blessing of those who live in committed same-sex relationships. Both feminist and gay liberation movements insist on a revisionist understanding of biblical texts that were previously held to be prohibitive and see the gospel primarily as a means of empowerment and change.

3. *In the case of both the ordination of women and the ordination of homosexuals, Galatians 3:28 is used in such a way as to sever redemption from creation.*

A short monograph that would become foundational in making a biblical case for the ordination of women, first published in 1958 and then in the USA after being translated into English by Emilie Sander in 1966, was Krister Stendahl's *The Bible and the Role of Women: A Case Study in Hermeneutics*. Stendahl maintained that Paul achieved an "evangelical breakthrough" in Galatians as the distinction between male and female was rendered obsolete. Stendahl writes, "But in Christ the dichotomy is overcome; through baptism a new unity is created, and that is not only a matter discerned by the eyes of faith but one that manifests itself in the social dimensions of the church."¹² The new reality of redemption transcends and replaces the old order of creation. Paul's defense of the old order in 1 Corinthians is seen as a necessary and eschatologically limited corrective for a chaotic situation in which the gospel was not yet fully apprehended. It is a penultimate and provisional concession.

Edward Schroeder¹³ extends Stendahl's basic hermeneutic to the question of the church's response to homosexuality. For Schroeder, the questions of blessings for same-sex unions and the ordination of homosexuals are answered in the affirmative on the basis of his application

The Ordination of Women in Biblical Lutheran Perspective, ed. Matthew C. Harrison and John T. Pless (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 137-152.

¹² Krister Stendahl, *The Bible and the Role of Women: A Case Study in Hermeneutics*, trans. Emilie T. Sander (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 33.

¹³ For a more detailed treatment of Schroeder's position, see John T. Pless, "Using and Misusing Luther in Contemporary Debates on Homosexuality: A Look at Two Theologians," *Lutheran Forum* 39 (Summer 2005): 50-57.

of a law/promise hermeneutic that he claims comes from Luther. According to Schroeder's construal of this hermeneutic, Luther's approach to the Scriptures is to see Christ at the heart and center of the Bible. Scripture itself consists of two words from God, one of law and another of promise. As Schroeder puts it,

Scripture's law serves as God's diagnostic agent—diagnosis of our malady, not prescription for our healing. God's Law is X-ray, not ethics. The healing for patients diagnosed by the Law is God's promise, the Christ-quotient of both OT and NT. The law's purpose (Paul said it first—after he received his “new” hermeneutics beginning at Damascus) is to “push sinners to Christ.”¹⁴

Once sinners are in Christ, according to Schroeder, they are no longer under the law but under grace.

Once Christ-connected they come into the force-field of his “new commandment,” and it really is new, not a refurbished “old” commandment, not “Moses rehabilitated.” Christ supersedes Moses—not only for salvation, but also for ethics. In Paul's language the touchstone for this new commandment is the “mind of Christ” and “being led by, walking by, his Holy Spirit.” More than once Paul makes it “perfectly clear” that this is a new “law-free” way of life.¹⁵

Schroeder then goes on to ask and answer the question of what we are to do with all the commands and imperatives in the Bible in light of this new way of life, free of the law. He concludes, “First of all, this new hermeneutic relativizes them.”¹⁶ Here Schroeder sees himself in company with Luther, especially Luther's treatise of 1525, “How Christians Should Regard Moses,”¹⁷ to which we shall return later. Arguing that the law applies only to the old creation while the promise constitutes life in the new creation, Schroeder asserts that human sexuality is clearly a component of the old creation, and hence is under the governance of the law.

There are things in Luther and the Lutheran confessional writings that seem to give credence to Schroeder's argument. In 1522, Luther wrote in his “The Estate of Marriage” that marriage is a bodily and outward thing:

¹⁴ Edward Schroeder, “Thursday Theology 159” (January 28, 2001), available at <http://www.crossings.org/thursday/2001/thur0628.shtml>.

¹⁵ Schroeder, “Thursday Theology 159.”

¹⁶ Schroeder, “Thursday Theology 159.”

¹⁷ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955-1986), 35:155-174 [henceforth *LW*].

"Know therefore that marriage is an outward, bodily thing, like any other worldly undertaking."¹⁸ Thus Luther recognizes the place of civil authority in regulating matters of sexuality and marriage.¹⁹

Does Luther's assessment of marriage as an outward thing, an artifact of the old creation, make questions of sexual ethics a matter of relativity, as Schroeder contends, and therefore lead to a definition of marriage elastic enough to include same-sex unions? Certainly not. There are several difficulties with Schroeder's approach. The first has to do with his understanding of the place of creation in Luther's thinking.

In contrasting the old creation with the new creation, Schroeder is concerned to show that the law is operative in creation both to deliver justice (recompense, as he puts it) and to preserve the fallen world from plunging into total chaos. Of course, these are themes that are readily found in Luther. Schroeder, however, makes an interpretative move that Luther does not make. While Luther surely sees that neither the laws of Moses nor civil laws, which vary from place to place and from one historical epoch to another, work salvifically, he does not view the law as being merely set aside by the gospel. To use the language of the Formula of

¹⁸ LW 45:25.

¹⁹ Luther sees marriage as grounded in creation. It is not a sacrament that bestows forgiveness, but there is no higher social calling where faith is exercised than that of the family. Marriage is the arena for faith and love. In 1519, Luther still regarded marriage as a sacrament. The change is evident in "The Babylonian Captivity" of 1520. In divesting marriage of its sacramental status, Luther actually elevates marriage as he makes it equal or superior to celibacy. See Scott Hendrix, "Luther on Marriage," *Lutheran Quarterly* 14 (Autumn 2000): 355; James Nestingen, "Luther on Marriage, Vocation, and the Cross," *Word & World* 23 (Winter 2003): 31-39; William Lazareth, *Luther on the Christian Home* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960); and Carter Lindberg, "The Future of a Tradition: Luther and the Family," in *All Theology is Christology: Essays in Honor of David P. Scaer*, ed. Dean Wenthe et al. (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 2000), 133-151. For a picture of Luther's contribution to the place of marriage in Western culture, see John Witte Jr., *From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion, and Law in the Western Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997), 42-73. Lindberg aptly summarizes Luther's impact on marriage: "Luther's application of evangelical theology to marriage and family desacramentalized marriage; desacralized the clergy and resacralized the life of the laity; opposed the maze of canonical impediments to marriage; strove to unravel the skein of canon law, imperial law, and German customs; and joyfully affirmed God's good creation, including sexual relations" (133). Also see the insightful treatments by Oswald Bayer in "The Protestant Understanding of Marriage," "Luther's View of Marriage," and "Law and Freedom in Marriage," in *Freedom in Response - Lutheran Ethics: Sources and Controversies*, trans. Jeffrey Crayzer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 156-205.

Concord, "The distinction between law and gospel is a particularly glorious light,"²⁰ but it is not a light that blinds us to the normative character of Holy Scripture. To reduce the distinction to an ideology abstracted from the actual content of the biblical texts blurs both God's judgment and his grace. Schroeder's law/promise hermeneutic ends up with a divorce between creation and redemption, a schism between faith and life that is foreign to Luther.²¹

Luther understands creation as the arena for God's work. When Schroeder makes the claim that homosexuals are simply "wired differently"²² than heterosexuals, he introduces into creation a relativism and subjectivism that is not in Luther. Luther, in fact, sees human identity as male and female as a creational reality. To use the words of William Lazareth, God's ordering of creation is heterosexual.²³ This can be seen in Luther's exposition of the Sixth Commandment in the Large Catechism: "He has established it (marriage) before all others as the first of all institutions, and he created man and woman differently (as is evident) not for indecency but to be true to each other, to be fruitful, to beget children, and to nurture and bring them up to the glory of God."²⁴ This is also expressed in a letter Luther wrote to Wolfgang Reissenbusch in March, 1527. After counseling Reissenbusch that he is free to renounce his vow of celibacy without committing sin, Luther observes, "Our bodies are in great part the flesh of women, for by them we were conceived, developed, borne, suckled, and nourished. And it is quite impossible to keep entirely

²⁰ FC SD V, 1; Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles Arand, et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 581 [Henceforth Kolb and Wengert].

²¹ Contra this divorce, see Bernd Wannenwetsch, "Luther's Moral Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, ed. D. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 120-135; William Lazareth, *Christians in Society: Luther, the Bible and Social Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001); Reinhard Huetter, "The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics," in *The Promise of Lutheran Ethics*, ed. K. Bloomquist and John Stumme (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 31-54. Schroeder asserts that "Huetter's conclusion really is 'the end' of the promise of Lutheran ethics"; "Thursday Theology 26" (November 12, 1998), <http://www.crossings.org/thursday/1998/thur1112.shtml>.

²² Schroeder, "Thursday Theology 34" (January 28, 1999), <http://www.crossings.org/thursday/1999/thur0128.shtml>.

²³ William Lazareth, "ELCA Lutherans and Luther on Heterosexual Marriage," *Lutheran Quarterly* 8 (Autumn 1994): 235-268. Lazareth writes, "Clearly, same-sex 'unions' do not qualify as marriages to be blessed for Christians who have been baptized as saints into the body of Christ. The Lutheran church should not condone the sinful acts (conduct) of an intrinsic disorder (orientation) in God's heterosexual ordering of creation" (236).

²⁴ LC I, 207; Kolb and Wengert, 414.

apart from them. This is in accord with the Word of God. He has caused it to be so and wishes it so."²⁵

In his "The Estate of Marriage" (1522), after noting God's design and purpose in creating humanity as male and female, Luther speaks of this ordinance or institution as "inflexible,"²⁶ beyond alteration. What Luther sees as a given, biological reality, Schroeder now moves into the realm of the subjective with an appeal to the explanation of the First Article in the Small Catechism. Luther's doxological confession that "God has created me together with all that exists" and that "God has given and still preserves my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all limbs and senses" is now used by Schroeder to make God the author of homosexuality. As Schroeder writes,

Luther doesn't mention sexuality in that gift-list, but today God puts it on the lists we have. If "hetero-" is one of the creator's ordainings, then wouldn't "homo-" also be on the gift-list for those so ordained? Isn't it "most certainly true" for both that they "thank, praise, serve and obey God" as the sexual persons they have been ordained to be? Both homosexuals and heterosexuals have a common calling to care for creation, carrying out the double agenda in God's secular world—the law of preservation and the law of recompense. If the gifts are different, the pattern of care will be different. What examples are already available within the ELCA of Christians—gay and straight—doing just that—preservation and recompense—with the sexual gift that God has ordained? Despite the current conflict, is it true about sexuality too that "what God ordains is always good?"²⁷

Luther's rejection of required clerical celibacy is seen by Schroeder as a precedent for relaxing requirements for individuals who understand themselves to be homosexual. Schroeder writes:

For outsiders to "require" celibacy of them as a prerequisite for the validity of their Christ-confession is parallel to the Roman church's "requirement" of celibacy for the clergy. Concerning that requirement the Lutheran Reformers said: God created the sexual "pressure" that surfaces at puberty. To "require" celibacy of the clergy—or anybody—is blatantly contradicting God. For those whom God "wired differently" as a student once described himself—regardless of how that different wiring came to

²⁵ Theodore Tappert, ed., *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel* (Vancouver, British Columbia: Regent College Press, 1995), 273.

²⁶ LW 45:18.

²⁷ Schroeder, "Thursday Theology 51" (May 27, 1999), <http://www.crossings.org/thursday/1999/thur0527.shtml>.

pass—requiring celibacy for him sounds like the same thing to me. It is God, not the gay guy, who is being contradicted.²⁸

Here Schroeder reveals a basic premise that is not shared by Luther, namely, that homosexuality is ordained by God. Luther does not speak of a generic sexual drive or instinct but of the desire of man for woman, and woman for man: "This is the Word of God, through whose power procreative seed is planted in man's body and a natural, ardent desire for woman is kindled and kept alive. This cannot be restrained either by vows or laws."²⁹ Luther seldom mentions homosexual behavior, but when he does, his evaluation is always negative. For example, Luther identifies the sin of Sodom with homosexuality. Commenting on Genesis 19:4-5, Luther writes,

I for my part do not enjoy dealing with this passage, because so far the ears of the Germans are innocent of and uncontaminated by this monstrous depravity; for even though disgrace, like other sins, has crept in through an ungodly soldier and a lewd merchant, still the rest of the people are unaware of what is being done in secret. The Carthusian monks deserve to be hated because they were the first to bring this terrible pollution into Germany from the monasteries of Italy.³⁰

In the same section of the Genesis lecturers, Luther refers to "the heinous conduct of the people of Sodom" as

extraordinary, inasmuch as they departed from the natural passion and longing of the male for the female, which is implanted into nature by God, and desired what is altogether contrary to nature. Whence comes this perversity? Undoubtedly from Satan, who after people have once turned away from the fear of God, so powerfully suppresses nature that he blots out the natural desire and stirs up a desire that is contrary to nature.³¹

²⁸ Schroeder, "Thursday Theology 159." Similar arguments are advanced by Christian Batalden Scharen, *Married in the Sight of God* (Landham, MD: University of America Press, 2000), although Scharen finally must admit that "an ethic for same-sex relationships goes nowhere with the 'letter' of Luther's views" (128). Likewise, Martha Ellen Stortz, "Rethinking Christian Sexuality: Baptized into the Body of Christ," in *Faithful Conversations: Christian Perspectives on Homosexuality*, ed. James M. Childs Jr. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 64-66.

²⁹ Tappert, *Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, 273. For similar statements in Luther see *Luther on Women: A Sourcebook*, ed. Susan C. Karant-Nunn and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2003), 137-170.

³⁰ LW 3:251-252.

³¹ LW 3:255; also note Luther's comment in "On War Against the Turk" (1529): "Both the pope and the Turk are so blind and senseless that they commit the dumb sins shamelessly, as an honorable and praiseworthy thing. Since they think so lightly of

Luther's rejection of homosexual activity is not merely a matter of aesthetic preference but rather a theological judgment rooted in the reality of the way the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness that will not acknowledge God to be the Creator and Lord that he is. For Luther, homosexuality is a form of idolatry, of false worship, as we see in his lectures on Romans.³² In attributing homosexuality to the creative will of God for certain human beings, Schroeder strangely overlooks the teaching of his mentor, Werner Elert, who maintains that creation places humanity in an ordered world of nomological existence.³³

4. Opponents of women's ordination and those who resist the acceptance of homosexuality as a moral equivalent to heterosexuality are both labeled as fundamentalists and legalists.

Taking "the interpretation closest to hand" as that one "which allows the text to say what it says most simply," to use the language of Hermann Sasse,³⁴ is equated with fundamentalism. The labeling then becomes a weapon of defense from listening to what is said in the text. A simple reading of the text that yields an undesired result is dismissed (i.e., that

marriage, it serves them right that there are dog-marriages (and would to God that they were dog-marriages), indeed, also 'Italian marriages' and 'Florentine brides' among them; and they think these things good. I hear one horrible thing after another about what an open and glorious Sodom Turkey is, and everybody who has looked around a little in Rome or Italy knows very well how God revenges and punishes the forbidden marriage, so that Sodom and Gommorah, which God overwhelmed in days of old with fire and brimstone (Gen. 19:24), must seem a mere jest and prelude compared with these abominations," *LW* 46:198.

³² Luther, in his exposition of Romans 1, links homosexual behavior with idolatry: "For this reason, namely: idolatry, God gave, not only to the above-mentioned disgrace, them, some of them, up to dishonorable passions, to shameful feelings and desires, before God, although even they, like Sodom, called this sin. . . . And the men likewise, with an overpowering drive of lust, gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion, which overpowered the judgment of their reason, for another, men with men, and thus they deal with each other in mutual disgrace, committing shameless acts and consequently, receiving the penalty, punishment, due for their error, fitting and just for so great a sin, the sin of idolatry, in their own persons, according to the teaching and arrangement of God," *LW* 25:12-13.

³³ See Werner Elert, *The Christian Ethos*, trans. Carl J. Schneider (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957). Elert writes, "Creation places man into the world, *nomos* binds him to the world. In the first place, nomological under law means only that we, like all other creatures, are subject to the orderly rule of God and that we do not live in a world of chaos and arbitrariness" (51).

³⁴ Hermann Sasse, "Did God Really Say . . . ? A Reply to Dr. Helmut Thielicke's Article 'Thoughtless, Doctrinaire, Loveless,'" in *The Lonely Way*, vol. 2, ed. Matthew C. Harrison (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), 318.

women cannot be pastors or that homosexual acts lie outside of the realm of God's design).

Lutherans are rightly allergic to the charge of legalism. Arguments were made for the ordination of women on the basis of the freedom of the gospel, as we have noted in Krister Stendahl. In a clever statement issued by revisionist clergy and laity in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and aimed polemically at supporters of the church catholic's traditional position on sexuality³⁵ under the title, "We Believe in the Gospel," advocates of a revised sexual ethic accuse those holding to scriptural teaching as those who have revised and abandoned the gospel by "turning it into law."³⁶

5. In making the case for women's ordination and for the ordination of homosexuals and the blessing of same-sex unions, biblical texts once taken as clear are argued to be unclear or dismissed as culturally conditioned and time bound.

Some assert that the contested texts relative to women in the pastoral office (1 Cor 14:33-38 and 1 Tim 2:11-14) and on homosexuality (Lev 18:22, 24; 20:13; Rom 1:24-27; 1 Cor 6:9-10; 1 Tim 1:9-10) clearly reflect the theological worldview of the biblical writers, but that these teachings are culturally conditioned and hence open to reassessment. Typical are the arguments that the Bible represents a patriarchal and/or heterosexualist structure that may be abandoned without doing violence to the essential message of the Holy Scriptures.³⁷ Others argue that the disputed texts are unclear and therefore incapable of providing a sure foundation for church practice.³⁸ In his 2006 book *Evangelical Feminism: A New Path to Liberalism*,

³⁵ For the defense of the traditional position by Canadian Lutherans, see "The Banff Commission Declaration on the Malaise That Affects the Church of our Days," in *The Banff Commission*, ed. K. Glen Johnson (New Delhi, NY: American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, 2008), 9-26.

³⁶ "We Believe in the Gospel of Jesus Christ," accessed on July 26, 2009 from <http://www.webelieveinthegospel.org/2652.html>.

³⁷ This presupposition in regard to women's ordination is critiqued by numerous essays in *Women Pastors? The Ordination of Women in Biblical Lutheran Perspective*, ed. Matthew C. Harrison and John T. Pless (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), and in regard to homosexuality by Armin Wenz, *The Contemporary Debate on Homosexual Clergy*, trans. Holger Sonntag (St. Louis: LCMS World Relief and Human Care, 2006), 3-24; also Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*.

³⁸ See, for example, an early attempt by Ruth Bretscher Rensmeyer, *Neither Male or Female* (East Northport, NY: Commission on Women of the Atlantic District LCMS, 1997). Rensmeyer draws heavily on Stendahl.

Wayne Grudem has demonstrated how both approaches have been adopted by some neo-Evangelical theologians.³⁹

6. *Ordination of women and ordination of homosexuals is seen as a matter of necessity for the sake of the gospel and mission.*

The case is made that a church that excludes women from the pastoral office (which is often equated with "positions of leadership") or renders a negative moral judgment on homosexual practice will not be attractive to a world that does not discriminate on the basis of gender or sexual orientation.⁴⁰ Furthermore, it is also asserted that all Christians need to be actively involved in missionary outreach.⁴¹ Teachings that would exclude some Christians on the basis of gender or sexual identity from full participation in the mission of the church are seen as detrimental to effective missionary outreach and as stumbling blocks to the proclamation of the gospel, which is meant for all people.

7. *Arguments for both the ordination of women and the ordination of homosexuals along with churchly blessing of same-sex unions are often made on the basis of what Alasdair MacIntyre has identified as an "ethic of emotivism."*⁴²

The case is made for women's ordination and an ethic affirming of homosexuality on the basis of emotional appeal.⁴³ The pain of exclusion, for example, is used by advocates to urge the church to respond with sympathy rather than restriction. With an "ethic of emotivism," claims to biblical authority or creedal teaching are trumped by an appeal to the emotional wellbeing of those who are denied access either to the pastoral office or to marriage.

³⁹ Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism: A New Path to Liberalism* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2006).

⁴⁰ See, e.g., Karl Wyneken, "Let's Include Women," in *A Daystar Reader*, ed. Matthew L. Becker (np: Daystar.net, 2010), 152.

⁴¹ See, e.g., Craig Nesson, *Many Members Yet One Body: Committed Same-Gender Relationships and the Mission of the Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 53. According to Nesson, ethical issues such as homosexual marriage have only "penultimate" significance, while the justification-centered mission of the church possesses "ultimate" significance and must not be compromised by issues of only penultimate concern.

⁴² Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

⁴³ See Scharen, *Married in the Sight of God*, 149–152; also note the emotionally charged letter of the former presiding bishop of the ELCA, Herbert W. Chilstrom, entitled "My View: Questions for Those Leaving the ELCA," *Mankato Free Press*, August 26, 2010.

8. *Women's ordination and the ordination of homosexuals are urged on the church for the sake of unity and inclusiveness yet both practices fracture genuine ecumenicity.*

Martha Ellen Stortz contributed an article, "Rethinking Christian Sexuality: Baptized into the Body of Christ," to the volume *Faithful Conversation: Christian Perspectives on Homosexuality*. She proposes a discussion of sexuality that begins with Baptism, thus avoiding the reality of humanity created as male and female. Her conclusions are predictable. Baptismal identity overrides sexual identity.⁴⁴ Thus sexual differentiation, distinctions between male and female, straight or gay are overcome by unity in the body of Christ. Christians may indeed entertain a variety of opinions regarding men and women in the life of the church, sexual preference, and ethics, but these differences are said not to be church divisive. Working with something akin to a paradigm of "reconciled diversity,"⁴⁵ these differences are to be lived with and even celebrated. In actuality, however, such an approach will finally exclude from unity those who hold a traditional position on these matters. When truth is sacrificed for unity, unity will finally demand the exclusion of those who insist on truth.

In reality, both women's ordination and an accommodation of a permissive ethic in regard to homosexuality have fractured churches. First of all, churches that have compromised on these issues have separated themselves from continuity with the catholic past. In that sense such communions may be said to have deserted "vertical ecumenism." They have become chronologically sectarian, introducing novelties unknown to apostolic and most of post-apostolic Christianity. Such a church can no longer confess the words of the prophets and the apostles to be the words of the living God. Second, these communions put themselves in a position that makes "horizontal ecumenism," conversation with Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism, even more difficult. Simply put, communions which determine theology and practice by majority vote and embrace religious pluralism lack credibility in ecumenical dialogue with Rome or the East.

⁴⁴ Stortz, "Rethinking Christian Sexuality: Baptized into the Body of Christ," in *Faithful Conversation*, 59-79.

⁴⁵ Here see Reinhard Slenczka, "Magnus Consensus: The Unity of the Church in the Truth and Society's Pluralism," *Logia* 13 (Holy Trinity 2004): 21-39. Slenczka observes that "magnus consensus" is reduced to "reconciled diversity as an external mark of the church at the expense of truth; the question of truth is circumvented by pointing to the diversity in scriptural interpretations" (25).

9. *Ordination of women, ordination of homosexuals, and ecclesiastical recognition of same-sex unions are at first proposed as a matter of compromise or as a local option, but they will finally demand universal acceptance.*

When ordination of women was introduced in Sweden, a "conscience clause" was included.⁴⁶ Incrementally the provisions of this protective measure were lessened and finally removed. Candidates for ordination must demonstrate their acceptance of the legitimacy of female clergy prior to ordination.⁴⁷ The Recommendations of the Sexuality Task Force in the ELCA propose something of a local option: individual synods and congregations may opt not to have homosexual clergy or to provide rituals for blessing same-sex couples. Such a compromise, however, will hardly satisfy either activists for change or those who believe that the scriptural ethic precludes the placing in office of those who practice homosexuality. To paraphrase Richard John Neuhaus, where orthodoxy is made optional, orthodoxy will finally be proscribed.⁴⁸

10. *It is argued that by refusing to ordain women and homosexuals to the pastoral office the church is deprived of the particular spiritual gifts they possess and that these individuals are unjustly denied the opportunity for spiritual self-expression.*⁴⁹

This argument relies on an understanding of the ministry that sees the ministry as an avenue for the expression of personal *charismata* rather than an office established by Christ and filled according to his mandates. Spiritual giftedness is confused with personal expression. Creativity and freedom to express oneself without boundary or restraint are celebrated in the name of autonomy. Given the spiritual climate of the postmodern context this becomes attractive as "gifts of the Spirit" are placed in contrast to a biblical/confessional understanding of office. Expressive individualism takes precedence over an understanding of an office instituted by Christ to serve his church with word and sacrament.

⁴⁶ Dag Sandahl, interview by William J. Tighe, "Swedish Dissent: Life as an Orthodox Churchman in the Church of Sweden," *Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity* 13 (July/August 2000): 36-37.

⁴⁷ Dag Sandahl, "Swedish Dissent," 36.

⁴⁸ Richard John Neuhaus, "The Unhappy Fate of Optional Orthodoxy," *First Things* 69 (January 1997): 57.

⁴⁹ See Scharen, 127-147; also note Patricia Jung and Ralph Smith, *Heterosexism: An Ethical Challenge* (Albany: The State University of New York Press, 1993), 170.

II. Conclusion

Reviewing arguments made for the ordination of women in Lutheran churches in the middle years of the twentieth century, it is hard not to conclude that variants of these arguments are currently being used to advocate the ordination of homosexuals and to provide for an ecclesiastical recognition of same-sex unions through an elastic definition of marriage that ignores both "nature and institution."⁵⁰ Creation is left behind in pursuit of purely spiritual categories and relational qualities. One Lutheran ethicist, Paul Jersild, is worried that some Christians have adopted an "excessively physicalist approach to homosexuality."⁵¹ Creation is seen as secondary, if not irrelevant. But without creation, there is no incarnation. Without creation, the new creation is reduced to a spiritualistic construct of one's own imagination.

After women's ordination was permitted in the Church of Sweden, Bishop Anders Nygren perhaps spoke prophetically when he said, "This current decision not only means a determination of the specific issue concerning female pastors, but I am convinced that our church has now shifted onto a previously unknown track heading in the direction of Gnosticism and the *Schwaermerei*."⁵² In a tentative and somewhat ambivalent way, Helmut Thielicke would take cautious but nevertheless perceptible steps down this path when he affirmed that the writers of Holy Scripture were opposed to women's ordination and homosexual practice but that these biblical prohibitions are not absolutely binding on us as the church acquires a new and deeper knowledge.⁵³

In the current move to sanction same-sex unions and provide access to the pastoral office, the Gnosticism and enthusiasm that were magnetic for

⁵⁰ Here see Oswald Bayer, "Nature and Institution: Luther's Doctrine of the Three Estates," in *Freedom in Response*, 90–118. Also note Knut Alfsvåg, "Christians in Society: Luther's Teaching on the Two Kingdoms and the Three Estates Today," *Logia* 14 (Reformation 2005): 15–20.

⁵¹ Paul Jersild, *Spirit Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 139. Also see Bernd Wannenwetsch's critique of the "docetic" turn taken by advocates of homosexual unions in his "Old Docetism—New Moralism? Questioning a New Direction in the Homosexuality Debate," *Modern Theology* 16 (July 2000): 353–364.

⁵² Quoted from *Kyrkometets protokoll*, nr. 4, 158, p. 154, in *Women Pastors? The Ordination of Women in Biblical Lutheran Perspective*, ed. Matthew C. Harrison and John T. Pless (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 9.

⁵³ See Helmut Thielicke, *The Evangelical Faith*, vol. 3, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 221–22; *The Ethics of Sex*, trans. John Doberstein (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 269–292. Also note Sasse's sharp rebuke in "Did God Really Say . . . ?," 317–322.

a departure from the New Testament mandates regarding man and woman in the church have seductively drawn Lutheran churches further away from their apostolic foundations. Those who celebrate these changes rightly see that they have created something new. Else Marie Pedersen, from the University of Denmark, argues that the ordination of women has humanized the church, yielding a new understanding of the church "so that ministry will be about the pastor's authenticity, rather than about who, on the surface is a normal male. Authenticity and honesty as well as a solid education ought to be more important than whatever sex or sexuality a pastor has, given that the gospel is proclaimed in Word and Sacrament."⁵⁴ This vision of the church with a ministry grounded in the "authenticity" of the pastor presents quite a different picture from the one given in the New Testament. Nygren's fears are confirmed, and we are left to ponder the weight of Hermann Sasse's observation that "there are some questions raised by the devil to destroy the Church of Christ. To achieve this he may use as his mouth piece not only ambitious professors of theology, his favorite tools, but also simple pious souls. Why women cannot be ordained is one of these questions."⁵⁵

The situation of world Lutheranism does not invite an arrogant and carnal security on the part of confessional churches that have not yet succumbed to the temptation to worldly compromise. Rather it is given to us to heed the apostolic admonitions to "keep a close watch on yourself and your teaching" (1 Tim 4:16) and "let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor 10:12).

⁵⁴ Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen, "Women's Ordination in Denmark: The Humanization of the Ordained Ministry," *Dialog* 48 (Spring 2009): 5-6.

⁵⁵ Hermann Sasse, "Ordination of Women," in *Women Pastors? The Ordination of Women in Biblical Lutheran Perspective*, ed. Matthew C. Harrison and John T. Pless (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 263-264. One may read Reinhard Slenczka's "When the Church Ceases to be the Church" as something of an extension of Sasse's point but now in relationship to ecclesiastical acceptance of homosexuality. His essay is published in *The Banff Commission* (New Delhi, NY: American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, 2008), 37-50.