Intersections

Volume 2006 | Number 22 Article 1

2006

Full Issue, Number 22, Spring 2006

The Congregational and Synodical Mission Unit, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

intersections

Spring 2006

in this issue

Lutherans and Human Sexuality

Purpose Statement | This publication is by and largely for the academic communities of the twenty-eight colleges and universities of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. It is published by the Vocation and Education unit of the ELCA. The publication has its home at Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois, which has generously offered leadership and physical and financial support as an institutional sponsor for the publication.

The ELCA has frequently sponsored conferences for faculty and administrators that have addressed the church-college/university partnership. The ELCA has sponsored an annual Vocation of the Lutheran College Conference. The primary purpose of *Intersections* is to enhance and continue such dialogue. It will do so by:

- Lifting up the vocation of Lutheran colleges and universities
- Encouraging thoughtful dialogue about the partnership of colleges and universities with the church
- Offering a forum for concerns and interests of faculty at the intersection of faith, learning, and teaching
- Raising for debate issues about institutional missions, goals, objectives, and learning priorities
- Encouraging critical and productive discussion on our campuses of issues focal to the life of the church
- Serving as a bulletin board for communications among institutions and faculties
- Publishing papers presented at conferences sponsored by the ELCA and its institutions
- Raising the level of awareness among faculty about the Lutheran heritage and connectedness of their institutions, realizing a sense of being part of a larger family with common interests and concerns.

From the Publisher | I am really looking forward to holding this issue of *Intersections* in my hands. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) as a church body is still a teenager; it was established in 1987-88. The journal *Intersections* is even younger. It has been published by the ELCA Division for Higher Education and Schools (DHES) since 1996, so it is only ten years old. But both the church body and the journal have gone through major changes this year.

The ELCA has gone through restructuring. The DHES no longer exists. The work for the church and the colleges and universities that are related to the ELCA continues almost as before, but it is now done within the Educational Partnerships and Institutions (EPI) group within the unit for Vocation and Education (VE). So even though those who work with the colleges and universities do the same work as before, we have new colleagues, new bosses, a new set of budget codes, and as you can see above, a whole new set of acronyms. Soon we will also have new offices on a different floor of the Chicago building where the churchwide offices are located.

Intersections has a new editor, Robert Haak, is located at a new college, uses a new printing firm, and has a new design and layout. This issue is devoted to one of the most important issues that the ELCA is dealing with right now, human sexuality. Many of us hate to talk about and read about sexuality, because it used to be a taboo topic, and because so many people have such strong opinions about it that no matter what we say or do we may offend. But a church that serves the needs of its members and the needs of this society must deal with it, and so I am glad that the ELCA is developing a social statement on sexuality, just as it is developing a social statement on education.

The first draft of *Our Calling in Education: A First Draft of a Social Statement* (2006) has now been distributed for discussion and comments. A copy may be requested from 1-800-638-3522, extension 2966, or downloaded from www.elca.org/socialstatements/education. The Task Force on Education would like to receive your comments no later than October 15, 2006, so they can consider them as they prepare the next draft for discussion and action at the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in 2007.

Living in God's Amazing Grace,

ARNE SELBYG | Director for Colleges and Universities

Contents

Number 22 | Spring 2006

intersections

Arne Selbyg | PUBLISHER
Robert D. Haak | EDITOR
Alyssa Bevans | STUDENT EDITORIAL ASSISTANT
Laura O'Melia | SECRETARY

PUBLISHED BY
The Vocation and Education Unit | The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

PUBLISHED AT
Augustana College
639 38th Street
Rock Island, Illinois USA 61201-2296

ON THE COVER
Reproduction of the image Hommage à Apollinaire, 1911-1912 by Marc Chagall. Courtesy of Van Abbe Museum, The Netherlands

From the Editor | ROBERT D. HAAK

TOM CHRISTENSON BEGAN his introduction to the last issue by asking what adjective should be used to describe that issue. That also seems like an appropriate question to begin my introduction to this Spring 2006 issue. Some of you who pay particular attention to the arrival of *Intersections* in your mailbox will answer that the most fitting adjective will be "late." There is truth in this description. As is often the case, when I inherited the editing duties for this journal from Tom Christenson, I misjudged the complexity of the task (and maybe also my own resources!). I hope that those of you who have been patiently waiting will find that the result was worth the wait.

My own preferred adjective would be "new" (we will have to wait to decide whether "and improved" should be added to the phrase). The journal has a new look and feel. We hope that the changes will enhance its readability and "eye appeal." We are coming to you from a new place—Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois. I would like to thank Augustana for its commitment to and support of this project. I hope that you will find some of the ideas in this issue new as well.

As is announced on the cover page, the theme of this issue is "Lutherans and Human Sexuality." I have to admit that growing up it never would have occurred to me that these two concepts belonged together. I imagine there are some readers out there who still feel this way. But, as Lutherans, it seems that we ought to have something valuable to say about such an important topic. The need to continue (or begin?) discussions was made clear by the controversies swirling around the votes taken at the Churchwide Assembly in Orlando last summer. While it is clear that some members of the ELCA hope the Orlando resolutions will be the last words on such topics, the continuing work of the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality and the report they will issue mean that the conversations are just beginning. This is especially true as we begin to talk about the much broader issues of human sexuality.

The question that I asked in putting together this issue was "what might ELCA colleges be able to contribute to the conversations about human sexuality?" Each of the articles in this issue gives a part of an answer to this question. Yeager calls on the colleges to educate in a way that will create the sort of community that can have these sorts of conversations and still remain a community. Colleges might well be models of this discourse. Benne ends with a similar thought but doubts that Lutheran colleges will be able to be the sort of place where this will happen. He concludes with a challenge to the colleges and universities to gather and to put into action the sort of conversations that they claim are at the heart of their identity.

In between these two calls for conversation we find the conversation modeled by Williams and Bussie. Williams proposes a model for how Lutherans might use the biblical text to inform the conversations that take place. She terms this a "critical traditionalist hermeneutic." Bussie proposes that the Lutheran confessions and Lutheran theology also can provide resources for this conversation.

While much of the conversation to this point has centered on the understanding of same sex relationships, Nack reminds us that the range of questions dealing with sexuality (Lutheran and non-Lutheran) is much broader than this question. Pastors and parishioners and college faculty and others are all faced with a wide range of ethical and social issues surrounding the understanding of human sexuality. One of the questions that I asked when beginning to think about these issues was what the data told us about the sexual activities and understandings of Lutheran college students today. My experience as a college teacher over the last twenty years seemed to indicate to me that sexuality was an issue that was fairly high on the list of "interesting topics" for my students. When checking into what we know about "sex and the Lutheran college student," I was a bit shocked to find out that we really don't know much about the topic. Our college students are surveyed on a wide range of subjects, but (maybe not too surprisingly) their sexual attitudes have not been an area of exploration. It may be that collecting some relevant data to inform the discussion is something that

the Lutheran colleges and universities could well contribute to the conversation.

In order to begin to fill the void, I asked the folks who conducted the National Study of Youth and Religion (http://www.youthandreligion.org) if they had data specifically on sexuality and Lutheran students. The answer came back that no one had ever asked the question before. That in itself is an interesting fact. I asked them to determine if there was enough data in their set to be able to say anything significant specifically about Lutheran youth. They found the following facts in their survey.[1]

- Nearly 43% of Lutheran teens do not necessarily believe that people should wait for marriage to have sex. (About the same percentage as for the total sample of teens sampled.)
- 68% of the ELCA teens would consider living with a partner to whom they were not married.
- Nearly 24% of Lutheran teens have engaged in oral sex. (Slightly higher than the total sample. Over 8% of the Lutherans had engaged in oral sex before age 15.)
- Over 16% of Lutheran teens have had sexual intercourse.
- Almost 80% of the Lutheran teens who had intercourse used protection.
- Over 90% of those Lutheran teens who had intercourse were not under the influence of alcohol or drugs during their first experience.
- More than 18% of Lutheran teens never attend church.
- More than 57% of Lutheran teens attend church more than a few times a year.
- Of this last group, 25% of the ELCA teens report that the church has done nothing to help them with their sexuality.

This might be the beginning of a conversation that seems to be very important to Lutheran teens—and probably to all of us. If 25% of these teens feel that the church has nothing helpful to say to them in this conversation, it seems that there is considerable room for improvement. Many questions remain. Would a larger data base result in significantly different results? What other questions could we ask with a larger sample? What are the important questions that need to be asked?

With Yeager and Benne, I would like to see what ELCA colleges and universities could add to the conversation about important issues facing the church and our communities. These conversations are also important for our own understanding of our role as "Lutheran colleges," not colleges isolated from the communities in which they exist.

I would like to thank Arne Selbyg, Director for Colleges and Universities and the Vocation and Education program unit for the chance to make a contribution to the ongoing conversations about the nature of Lutheran colleges. I would also like to thank Tom Christenson for all the assistance he has given in making the transition to this "new" journal a smooth one. I would ask each of you who read and value *Intersections* to consider submitting your thoughts for perusal by your colleagues. Please send any submissions (preferably in electronic MLA format) to me at avrbh@augustana.edu. I look forward to the continuation of this work!

ROBERT D. HAAK | The Augustana Center for Vocational Reflection, Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois

Endnotes

1. These results were reported to me on 4/5/2006 based on the analysis of Kyle Longest who works for the National Study of Youth and Religion. "Lutheran teens" for the purposes of this study are defined as teens whose parents identified themselves as Lutheran. They are not necessarily teens who attend Lutheran colleges and universities. The total number of "Lutheran teens" was 135. The number of "ELCA Lutheran teens" was 50. This is a relatively small number within the total survey. While it might be hoped that a larger sample could be examined, this is the best that I could find at this point. Have any of the faculty at any of our colleges asked these sorts of questions of their students?

D. M. YEAGER

A Church, the Human Condition, and the Fissured Face of Peace[1]

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.

—Ephesians 2:13, 14

To fulfill these purposes, this church shall: . . . Study social issues and trends, work to discover the causes of oppression and injustice, and develop programs of ministry and advocacy to further human dignity, freedom, justice, and peace in all the world.

—ELCA Constitution, sec. 4.03.1

IN JANUARY 2005, after nearly three years of work, the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality released its report and its three recommendations concerning the church's policies relating to same-sex couples. From this report, the Church Council developed three resolutions, which were made public in April; two of these matched the recommendations of the task force, but the third differed. In August the Churchwide Assembly acted on these resolutions and the multiple amendments and substitute motions that were proposed from the floor. The first two resolutions were affirmed by the Assembly (the second with an amendment of wording, the effect of which was variously interpreted); the third was defeated, as were all of the substitute motions advanced by voting members. These dry facts give no hint of the turmoil, at the level of both intellectual exchange and practical maneuvering, that has characterized the ELCA since the 2001 Churchwide Assembly placed these disputes near the top of the agenda of our church. As a member of that task force, I have been invited to reflect on what "lessons for the church's educational mission" might be derived from this experience. Perhaps counterintuitively, I would like to focus on what might be learned about peace.

If furthering "peace in all the world" is part of the mission of the church, then it is also the mission of Lutheran colleges and universities. We all, I suspect, carry around in our minds some very sentimental and romanticized notions of peace, notions that make it difficult to imagine that the controversy, anger, and alienation swirling around Lutheran teachings and policies relating to same-sex couples could be at all relevant to a ministry of peace, except as exemplifying its absence. Yet if we equate peace with the absence of disagreement, then truly there could be no peace, and all efforts to promote it would be futile. I would like to propose that we try, inspired by this passage

D. M. YEAGER *is Associate Professor of Theology at Georgetown University and a member of the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality.*

from Ephesians, to equate peace, instead, with the absence of hostility and violence (and that we construe "violence" broadly as coercive force). Margaret Payne and James Childs quoted this scriptural text at the end of the letter with which they submitted the task force recommendations to the Church Council. Above their signatures, the letter closed, "In Christ's peace."

My theme, then, is "the fissured face of peace"—and by this I mean to invoke a rock face that is cleft, cracked, and broken. I dislike postmodern jargon, but "fissured" is one of the terms that I have found very helpful. "Fissures" point to contradictions, silences, disconnects, discontinuities, conflicts, and disagreements; but the important thing about fissures is that they do not go all the way through whatever medium (face) they disrupt.

When the task force was created, many expected—or at least hoped—that it would, by diligent and careful study, listening, and reasoning, produce peace in the church by supplying final and definitive answers to the questions at the heart of the controversy. The church longed for the restoration of tranquility and appointed a task force to achieve that. Not surprisingly, in the months after the task force report became public, considerable disappointment and criticism were voiced because the task force had not "settled the question." In the first part of this article, I will review why the task force did not do what many had expected. The factors that account for the course the task force pursued involve us in reflection on the nature of moral controversies, the inevitability of change, and the ways in which communities undertake to deal with controversies, dissent, and challenges to received tradition and authority. While we may wish to think about all of these things in ways that draw upon the Christian and Lutheran understanding of our situation before God and before one another, we cannot think about them in isolation from a well-grounded understanding of the human condition, or the realities of (fallen) creation. To be careless on this point in our pursuit of peace is to end up chasing after some invention of our dreams. In the second section, then, I will draw upon Hannah Arendt's incisive description of the human condition to highlight some of these indelible features of our creaturely being, and in the last section I will suggest some ways in which a deep and reverent understanding of the human condition might be accented in our colleges and universities, with the hope of enabling our graduates to disagree without hostility, to evaluate without hatred or condescension, to engage change in positive and constructive ways, and to embrace in hope and courage the difficult work of making our views more true, our judgments more reliable, and our institutions more humane and just.

Reasons for not "settling the question"

It is probably fair to say that the report pleased no one. Those who were not particularly invested in these questions either way were discouraged and disappointed to find that no final word had been spoken to end what has developed into a bitter controversy. They had been hopeful that there would be a definitive resolution one way or another that would, as they often put it, allow the church to "move on" and redirect its energy and passion toward other urgent concerns such as economic justice, the deteriorating situations in the Middle East and the Sudan, the health-care challenges we face in the United States, hunger and homelessness in our own country and in the world, and ecological degradation. The task force had been appointed to produce clarity and end a squabble, and since, as a practical matter, we did not do that, they judged that we had failed to fulfill the charge we were given.

Others saw the failure as a moral and theological one. To them, the report had the look of moral spinelessness—and it looked that way both to those who had hoped that the task force would affirm the existing policies and support their enforcement, and to those who had hoped that the task force would recommend revising those policies in the name of justice. In a list-serve e-mail released January 14, 2005 (the day after the report and recommendations were made public), Roy A. Harrisville III, Executive Director of Solid Rock Lutherans, condemned the report for failing to "reflect both the biblical faith of millions and the desire for a clear word from our Church leadership." Focusing on the third recommendation, he wrote, "With this recommendation, the Task Force has stated that sexual boundaries do not matter now, if they ever did." From the other side, our work was faulted for elevating church unity over both truth and justice. Larry Rasmussen, a Lutheran ethicist writing in *The Network Letter,* was particularly forceful in his criticism on this point. The outcome of years of work by the task force was marked by an "absence of the spirit and courage of a church of the Reformation" (4). Noting Luther's own confidence that "the living, active Word of God that suffuses all creation can and might bring us all to a new place, as a church ever in need of reform," he complained that "the daring, the venturesomeness, and the creativity that mark this joyful dynamic of Reformation freedom seem hedged about on every side in the Task Force report" (4). The task force had, in his view, "compromised the reformation" and "miss[ed] the chance to be Lutheran" (4, 5).

Lost in sin as we all are, it is more than possible that some or all of these negative assessments are accurate. Still, I cannot escape the sense that most of what has been written and said about our report fails to appreciate what may have been its most

important contribution: its effort to give substance and meaning to the notion of the church as a community of moral deliberation. Of course, it is possible that we failed at that too, but that is a conversation that is still waiting to happen.

Moral judgments, moral conflicts

Moral conflicts arise out of the nature of moral judgment. All knowledge claims involve interpretation and judgment, even simple descriptions of fact and even empirical, scientific findings. The role of judgment, or what Michael Polanyi calls the personal coefficient of knowledge, is more obvious and more dominant in the domains of religion, philosophy, and ethics than in other spheres of human inquiry and conviction. All judgments are subject to dispute by others who judge differently, but such contestations are much more widespread in moral and religious matters because (1) the realities in question are complex, difficult to isolate, and comparatively elusive; (2) more people feel that they know enough, on the basis of their own experience, to speak out with an authoritative voice; and (3) the issues at stake cut so incisively into their own action, self-understanding, and interests that people feel compelled by reason of their own integrity to defend their views and convictions. The important thing to understand here is that no amount of goodwill or education is going to banish moral and religious disagreement.

Yet not all moral conflicts are alike. Conflicts arise for different reasons and the differences in cause have important implications for how, and even whether, the disagreement can be resolved.

1. Some arise from inadequate understanding of the situation or defective reasoning about the situation. Conflicts of this sort are usually able to be resolved through education and careful critical analysis of the arguments offered by the opposing sides. Fortunately, the majority of our disagreements (moral and otherwise) are probably of this sort.

2. Some arise because of deeper conflicts about underlying issues. These are harder to resolve because parties to the conflict first have to be brought to see that the ostensible subject of disagreement is not the actual subject of disagreement, and they then have to be willing to engage the conversation at the proper level.

3. Some arise out of divergent judgments about the relative weight (or the proper ordering and balancing) of competing high-level values. Disputes of this kind can be impossible to resolve (centuries of disagreement between pacifist Christians and Christians who condone the carefully regulated use of fatal force provide a familiar example here).

4. Some arise from divergent styles of moral reasoning. Here we might think of conflicts between ethicists who reason primarily in terms of goals or ends and ethicists who reason primarily from prima facie duties.[2] Or we might think of ethicists who start with Scripture and ask how it applies to experience and ethicists who begin with experience and ask how Scripture illuminates experience.

5. Some, it must be admitted, arise from sin, pride, sloth, bigotry, self-indulgence, and other forms of self-centeredness, viciousness, or bad faith.

In the discussion that follows, I am going to disallow appeal to the fifth reason as a way of accounting for our current disputes—though I notice that many people do appeal precisely to this explanation. I disallow it because (1) my own observations do not support it and (2) Christian charity requires that we put the best possible construction on the arguments of others.

The widespread disappointment reflects the fact that people thought this controversy was of the first variety—that it was a problem that could be resolved by concentrated study that would reveal what the church ought to do. I thought that myself when I began the work. But greater understanding has not yielded a resolution of this conflict; it actually seems sometimes to deepen the disagreement. Reflecting in his February 2005 newsletter on "What We've Learned about Ourselves" as a result of the years of study, Bishop Theodore Schneider noted that "there was a strong belief and hope across the church that if we all shared the same information we would be able to come to a consensus of agreement. Simply put, the problem was thought to be one of education." The massive study efforts were not without effect. "We have learned a great deal about one another and, I believe, have come to a new appreciation of one another. But it does not appear that many minds were changed, just as the same appears to have been true on the Task Force itself." And so, he concludes, another thing that "we have already learned is this: We may well live ourselves into change in this church and in our society, but we shall never argue ourselves into it" (2).

While study and education are hardly useless in the present case, it has become apparent that this controversy has deep and various roots, not all of which are actually ethical. I happen to have concluded that the controversy is primarily a controversy of the second sort and that the underlying issues are not actually moral or ethical at all, but for purposes of this article, it is not important whether the controversy is of the second, third, or fourth type. Whichever of these types it is, it is not a controversy that a task force can "settle" for the church. This is partly because such conflicts sometimes do end at an impasse, but it is mostly because where such deep and responsible disagreements

arise, the church, as a whole community, must struggle toward a resolution. It cannot delegate that work to some subsidiary agency in the way that the work of study or fact-finding can be delegated. It was thus the considered judgment of the task force that time, forbearance, and widespread conversation would be required for this process to be carried through successfully—if it can be carried through at all. That was why we began by recommending that our church "concentrate on finding ways to live together faithfully in the midst of our disagreements." Our second and third recommendations were offered as suggestions as to how the church might conduct itself as that continuing conversation unfolds.

Communities and their conflicts

Our recommendations notwithstanding, it is obvious that a number of different courses are open to a community when education and logical argument fail to persuade and produce one-mindedness or consensus. Not all of them are mutually exclusive, but only two of them seem conducive to the continuing dialogue and mutual discernment that distinguish a *community* of moral deliberation.

The most typical response is probably the determination to overcome dissent by an exercise of power. It is possible (and sometimes, for the common good, necessary) to compel obedience where agreement cannot be won by argument. Whether the obedience one is compelling is obedience to traditional authority, the law of the land, the will of a powerful elite, or the will of a voting majority, the method of resolution is the same. It is certainly the case that human communities cannot get on in an orderly way without such recourse to the exercise of power, but it does not follow that all fractious disagreements are best dealt with in this way. A defeated but unpersuaded faction can remain a source of significant discord. Moreover, in voluntary associations, compelling people to do things can get a little tricky. People are, after all, free to leave, and they often do.

Consequently, a true and final division of the house is another way of coping with deep and abiding disagreement. From its first meeting, the task force has been acutely aware that a significant number of current ELCA members believe that if other members cannot be brought to see moral truth as they do, the appropriate outcome would be the separation of ELCA Lutherans into smaller church bodies that are each more uniformly like-minded. If their interpretations and judgments do not prevail, those who believe that Scripture demands the affirmation and rigorous enforcement of current teachings and policies pertaining to sexual conduct appear to be prepared to leave the ELCA in order to form their own church. Should this occur, the congregations electing to remain identified as the ELCA would also constitute a more homogeneous church. In practice, this sort of redrawing of system boundaries is a common way of addressing intractable disputes in voluntary organizations, and in practice, this resolution often follows attempts to resolve disputes by an exercise of power. Of course, it should not be overlooked that an announcement by part of a community that they are moving toward separation is itself a fairly muscular exercise of power. Neither should it be overlooked that "church shopping" and the transition from "churched" to "unchurched" are other manifestations of this same phenomenon. Such maneuvers often seem more oriented toward comfort than toward peace (as the bitterness and disdain that afflict the newly established boundaries make plain). More importantly, if we habitually dissociate ourselves from people who see things differently, we may actually diminish any possibility of rendering our views more nearly true.

In the face of conflict, some members of a community may respond by trying to de-escalate the issue, recasting it as one that does not matter, or at least does not matter as much as (or in the way that) others in the community think it does. On its surface, this may seem like an irresponsible or even malicious technique for buying peace by trivialization. Yet when bitter controversies are fed (intentionally or unintentionally) by incendiary rhetoric, false dichotomies, misrepresentation of contending arguments, and unrelenting focus on worst-case scenarios, it can be a work of grace to try to enhance the community's sense of balance and proportion. Such efforts represent something quite different from relativistic laissez-faire, nor do they entail any abdication of principle. They are, on the contrary, strategies that may be essential to the restoration of the degree of community necessary to allow honest and principled moral deliberation.

It is also open to a community to intentionally choose to accommodate legitimate divergence (by which I mean well-grounded, well-informed, principled disagreement) in order to continue together in conversation in the hope (perhaps only eschatological) that we may come to find some common ground. The period of accommodation may be comparatively brief and transitional or it may last for centuries. When Luther nailed his theses to the door, he was not proposing to split the community; he was inviting the community to talk together about difficult and contentious issues—to recognize its own divisions and try together to separate correctable corruption from legitimate dispute. The history of the Reformation and its aftermath teaches us how alien to human nature and to the infrastructure of human organizations this notion of accommodative, deliberative peace actually is. On the Christian biblical understanding, peace is not, as John Macquarrie points out, a normative, static condition that is, from time to time, regrettably disrupted by

troublers of the communal equilibrium; rather, "peace is … a process and a task as man moves from potentiality to realization" (19). Reflecting on Eph. 2:13, he continues, "When Christ bequeathed the gift of peace to his followers and when as the climax of the beatitudes he commended the peacemakers, we can see in retrospect that this was not the promise of tranquillity but the invitation to continue a costly work" (22). The work of peace is the work of reconciliation.

The task force, as a microcosm of our church, could have, after all its study, listening, and argument, tried to "settle the question" by taking a vote and declaring the majority victorious and the majority's views true. The task force did not do this, and in retrospect I have come to think that that was our most important contribution. I can make some guesses as to how such a vote would have turned out, but I truly do not know—because we never took it. We declined to exercise majority power out of respect for the conscience of those who, by reason of conviction and integrity, found themselves to be of different minds. In offering our church the report and recommendations that we offered, the task force modeled its belief that we are a community, and that communities (1) should seek to operate by consensus and (2) in the absence of consensus, do best if they acknowledge and accommodate their conflicts rather than either denying them or allowing them to flare into feuds.

Re-formation

Just as it is important not to identify peace with the absence of conflict, so it is important not to equate peace with stasis. We (the task force and the church at large) are in *medias res*—somewhere in the midst of one strand of the great, complex evolutionary process of being the church under the call of a living God who moves and acts in history. This is *always* the case; the current situation simply highlights this for us.

I have heard many people frame the problem in terms of whether or not the church should change. The question is not whether to change, but how to change. Even if the 2005 Churchwide Assembly had voted by an overwhelming majority to affirm existing teachings, practices, and policies and to uniformly enforce existing policies regarding lesbian and gay rostered ministers, the church would have changed. It would have become a church that, having scrutinized these teachings and all the reasons that people give for disagreeing with these teachings, had reaffirmed the teachings and policies in the face of that challenge and without concession to it. It would, by its very intentional act of reaffirming its received teachings, have become a church different from the church of thirty to fifty years ago in which the question simply did not come up because homosexual orientation was not acknowledged and same-sex couples were invisible.

Change can be good, neutral, or bad. Moreover, it can be all three at once—not just because different observers view it differently, but because the actual costs, burdens, and benefits of change fall differently on different sectors of a community and on different individuals. Change can be slow or rapid. Some favor slow change; others favor rapid change. The more one has invested in existing arrangements, the more one favors stability and (if change cannot be avoided) slow or evolutionary change—thus, people often become more averse to change as they age, while the young sometimes seem to specialize in rebellion. There are many other good reasons not to proceed precipitously (not least among them the fallibility of human judgments about the right and the good), and institutional churches (as contrasted with more volatile and ephemeral religious movements) tend to move very deliberately. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that highly significant changes often occur long before they are acknowledged, producing a kind of institutional cognitive dissonance or even something close to unintentional hypocrisy.

Social systems are extremely complex, and the impetus toward change tends to arise not from *within* a single component of a given system but from the friction between systems, between a comprehensive system and one or more internal subsystems, or between subsystems within a comprehensive system. Moreover, systems tend to have porous rather than rigid boundaries, and people tend to be "resourced" by more than one system (that is, we all participate in multiple social systems and subsystems). Consequently, communal life and organizational systems are not characterized by unanimous agreement. The affective bonds of loyalty and need are probably at least as important in maintaining a cohesive social system as the bonds arising from cognitive agreement. Yet in strong and durable communities, there tends to be a strong, rich, and comparatively comprehensive consensus (though this consensus ought probably to be thought about more on the model of what we might call family relationships rather than on the model of universal accord on a few central beliefs).[3]

"Consensus" is a hard word to define, but it is pretty clear that our church, considered nationally and considered particularly in light of the recorded votes of the Assembly, no longer has a *strong* consensus on the particular matter of just treatment of Lutheran same-sex couples in monogamous lifelong relationships. Some on the task force felt that there is no emerging consensus either. I, in contrast, suspect (partly on the basis of those votes at Churchwide Assembly[4]) that we are in fact seeing the slow emergence of a new consensus, but if so, it is still years away. In a just community, punishment of behaviors has to be backed and legitimated by strong consensus as to the unacceptability of the behavior in question; otherwise, the sanctions will seem to

many to be arbitrary, unfair, and discriminatory. In the absence of consensus, the task force recommended that policy should not be altered (implicitly, but not explicitly, acknowledging that policy alteration should reflect consensus in the community). However, the task force paired that respect for existing policy with recommendations that this church (1) undertake the kind of continuing dialogue that would allow either the emergence of a new consensus or a "repristinization" of the old consensus and (2) in the interim practice prudential deference and forbearance in the enforcement of policies that came about under a consensus that no longer exists.

To the extent that ethics, policy, and leadership are always most fundamentally "about" the management of change, they demand great wisdom and discernment in differentiating among (1) what needs to be protected and preserved for the good of our common life, (2) what needs to be adapted or reinterpreted or renewed or reformed, and (3) what can be or needs to be relinquished or actively repudiated. As we have seen, the report and recommendations of the task force were bound to disappoint those who considered the controversy to be resolvable by careful study. However, if one thinks instead that the task force was called to assist the church in addressing change and in responding as Lutherans to conscientious and principled dissent, the report and recommendations will seem, not necessarily more satisfying, but less like a default or evasion. In *Journey Together Faithfully, Part 2,* the task force exposed the degree to which the church itself has already changed by displaying the range of views held by faithful Lutherans—a portrait of the church that was validated many times over by the debate and actions of the Assembly. The recommendations themselves were built upon the belief of the task force that we, as a church, are not *at this time* able to clearly discern, with respect to this particular issue, what needs to be protected and preserved, what needs to be renewed or reformed, and what ought to be relinquished. Rather than urging false closure, the task force urged continuing conversation in which all voices will be heard.

Features of the human condition

In speaking about judgment, about change and temporality, and about the nature of social systems, I have already begun the exploration of our situation as creaturely beings, but to this I now want to add some specific insights from the work of Hannah Arendt. In *The Human Condition*, first published in 1958 and continuously in print ever since, she begins with the indisputable observation that human beings are conditioned creatures; that is, we are the sort of creatures that exist in an environment on which we are dependent for our existence as the sort of creatures that we are. Although the conditions of our creatureliness "never condition us absolutely" (11), they are, nonetheless, the conditions of the possibility of our living and acting at all. We forget them or deny them at our peril. What, then, does she think these inexorable and empowering conditions are? "Life itself, natality and mortality, worldliness, plurality, and the earth" (11). Although she herself does not write from a religious perspective, there is much that Lutherans can learn from her treatment of our terrestrial, creaturely being—and from her darker insight that although "the earth is the very quintessence of the human condition," human beings "[seem] to be possessed by a rebellion against human existence as it has been given" (2). It is possible, as she acknowledges, that science and technology are in the process of actively altering the human condition itself, but if we do not even know what it is that we are altering (and she identifies "thoughtlessness" as "among the outstanding characteristics of our time" [5]), we can hardly make reliable judgments about the direction or the consequences of that process. But leaving aside the question of whether human beings can, in fact, alter the very conditions and limits of our own conditioning reality, she confines herself "to an analysis of those general human capacities which grow out of the human condition and are permanent, that is, which cannot be irretrievably lost so long as the human condition is not changed" (6).

Life and earth require little explanation, but the other four dimensions of the human condition require more elaboration.

Natality and *mortality* capture "the [biological] conditions under which life has been given to man" (9). They can be gathered together as the two dimensions of *earthliness*. These she calls "the most general conditions of human existence" (8). We are finite, embodied, limited, perspective-bound creatures who grow, change, reproduce ourselves, and eventually decay and die. We must labor to sustain the biological processes that maintain life. In these dimensions, the human condition is not different from the conditions of all animal life, although we differ from the animals quite remarkably in our ways of meeting these necessities.

Worldliness names the uniquely human capacity to create layers of reality that are not given with our biological condition: linguistic systems; laws and systems for their development, amendment, and administration; markets, wealth, and money or other media of exchange; electrical power grids and communication networks; industrial complexes; knowledge and methods of inquiry that can be recorded and transmitted across geographical and temporal boundaries; social trust and moral expectations—to name only a few of the most obvious. We dwell in a biological ecosystem, but we also dwell in a constructed "world" of artefacts (Manhattan was not carved out of rock by natural forces) and in a transhistorical web of unspecifiably complex

mental, social, and operational systems. Worldliness comprises our own "self-made conditions, which, their human origin and their variability notwithstanding, possess the same conditioning power as natural things" (9).

Plurality is "the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live" (8). We lose sight of the extraordinary gift of being different—probably because so many of our most vexing problems arise out of this gift. Arendt urges us to appreciate the fact that the alternative to this would be a situation in which all human beings "were endlessly reproducible repetitions of the same model, whose nature or essence was the same for all and as predictable as the nature or essence of any other thing" (8). There would be no disagreement, no conflict, no dissonance, no interhuman tension, no hierarchies, no equality (since that is distinct from sameness), no surprises, no change, no action properly so called, no history, no politics, no ethics, no evaluation, no failure, and no success. There would be general laws and predictable behavior, and that is all.

The full appreciation of the conditions of worldliness and plurality conveys an additional coloration upon the condition of *natality*. We are born as biological creatures requiring biological sustenance, but every infant arrives as a stranger and a potential actor capable of bringing about something new: "the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting. In this sense of initiative, an element of action, and therefore of natality, is inherent in all human activities" (9).

The church's educational mission

Reflection on our creatureliness makes it hard to sustain the dream of perfect harmony as anything other than an eschatological hope. It helps us to see why the only peace for which we can hope is fissured and unstable, a temporal possibility best understood, as Macquarrie has reminded us, as an endless, difficult, and costly process, not a situation or achievement. Understanding peace in this way, we might think together about how the "ministry and advocacy" of peace might be folded into our college's educational mission as something other than pious exhortations to beat swords into plowshares and make war no more. We might begin by simply asking how the colleges can help to create a vibrant community of moral deliberation in which dividing walls are broken down, coercion is reserved for "last resort," and inspirited care and respect crowd out recrimination and abuse.

Worldliness

"World" is through and through communal. The great articulate systems that constitute the fabric of our human lives are received through education. Education is the memory and the life and the future of these systems, and every educative object and event (every conversation, every examination, every book, every syllabus, every classroom exchange) both preserves the received system and changes it, forming the newcomers for their own work of preservation and reformation. Taking "worldliness" seriously not only enriches our understanding of the critical importance of what we do as teachers but also suggests that we might do well to centralize, perhaps as a feature of our general education curriculum, courses that explore the nature, function, meaning, indispensability, frictions, and operations of human social systems. Lutheran colleges might even facilitate Christian community by enabling their students to see the church as just such a social system (it may be far more than that, but it is most definitely at least that): a living community of word and action, not some sort of sea-bottom sedimentary "deposit of faith." Courses that stress the interrelations of individuals and communities (the dependence of individuals on their communities, the frictions between the individual and the community, the responsibilities of individuals for the preservation and adaptation of their communities) might help our graduates not only to function better in the civic world but also to exercise more effective lay and professional leadership in the church itself.

Earthliness

We are finite, limited, embodied, perspective-bound creatures who see partially and imperfectly. While we all offer lip service to this notion, left to our own devices most of us operate as if we were the sole possessors of truth and as if some neon light had gone on in the sky assuring us that our judgments are endorsed by God. If as educators we were to take our earthliness seriously, we would spend a lot more time helping our students understand that human moral and intellectual claims are judgments, not some kind of transcriptions of truth read off reality as we might copy out a passage from a book. And if we go out of our way to teach our students that human moral and intellectual claims are judgments, we must, of course, go even further out of our way to help our students make discriminations between judgments that are (comparatively) suspect and unreliable and judgments that are (comparatively) trustworthy and reliable. In the face of entrenched American anti-intellectualism and postmodern universalized suspicion, we must encourage respect for expertise and other forms of earned authority. But we must pair this emphasis on deference to legitimate authority and proven wisdom with companion emphasis on the responsibility to actively engage

that authority and wisdom patiently, critically, and discerningly. Conscience is not passively received; it is actively formed, and it is because it is so closely linked with personal integrity that we speak of it as inviolable (but not infallible). By way of the portal of conscience we can, as educators, reopen the discussion of tolerance, not as a political expediency, but as itself a fully defined virtue, an excellence grounded in a Christian understanding of creation and a bulwark against idolatry.

Mortality

We are temporal creatures in a temporal, historical world. The lives of persons, organizations, institutions, and civilizations have an arc that rises, peaks, and deteriorates. Nothing endures that does not change, and some things that change do not endure. For that reason, we might consider making it our goal to see that no student graduates with a bachelor's degree from a Lutheran college without having developed a refined historical consciousness. Could we offer more courses in history—perhaps history across the curriculum? Could we require more history or at least more courses that work historically? We should do less comparing of snapshots (this was Rome, this was feudal Europe, this was the Renaissance) and more looking at historical change, the evolution of social systems, and their interplay. How did this group of people actually get from A to B? While it certainly continues to be important to study religions in light of typological differences and to examine religious beliefs and practices on their own merits, could we do a better job of studying Christianity as it changes over time? Where this is done at all, it tends to be done as a study in the history of ideas, but we need also to study Christian beliefs, teachings, and practices as they change in relation to changes in economics, migrations, or political arrangements—and in relation to the social situation of the members of particular church bodies.

Natality

Our students are the natal horde of newcomers, the strangers who are only partially at home in the world that we have ourselves received, sustained, and remade. They both ardently seek assimilation into our world(s) and rebelliously resist it. We know them, at some deep level of our teacherly hearts, as both our hope and our enemy. If the things we treasure, and the fabric of memory and understanding that we represent and preserve, are to persist into the unfathomable future, they will have to be preserved and transmitted by these alternately sullen and receptive, alternately passionate and indifferent, young people hidden under their baseball caps in the back row. These memories, these interpretations, these intentions will have to be adapted and nurtured by this rising generation as our generation has adapted and nurtured them. And these young people, as they take these gifts from our hands, will change, and perhaps discard, what we have spent our lives on, just as, in so spending our lives, we changed and sometimes lost, sometimes rejected what we received. The blessing in all this is that they will, in speech and action, renew and reconstruct these traditions as they make them their own.

Plurality

There are six billion of us and we are all (despite the degree of our genetic similarity) remarkably different. We come from different social worlds; even within the same social world, people have different experiences depending on their race, their sexuality, their class and status, and innumerable other factors. We live in multiple social worlds and "speak" multiple symbolic languages. Lutherans are different from the unchurched and from other Christians; Lutherans are, let us not forget, different from Lutherans.

I would like to see Lutheran colleges make a concerted attempt to supplement our course offerings in the traditional study of epistemology with attentiveness to American pragmatism and with careful and informed study of the sociology of knowledge. I have noticed over the years that scholars with religious commitments (and certainly religious leaders writing for broad publics) tend to demonize pragmatism and the sociology of knowledge as subjectivistic and relativistic endeavors that undermine or deny the validity of moral judgments and human efforts to sort out truth from error. This represents a very unfortunate misunderstanding of both American pragmatism and the serious attempts now underway to study human knowledge claims contextually. We are not obliged to choose sides between the spineless relativists and what William James called "absolutism." Scholars and scientists have been busy for a century and a half developing alternatives to this false dichotomy. However, if so many opinion-shapers have somehow overlooked this development, it seems likely that we are not doing a very good job of teaching it.

In addition, taking plurality seriously implies that we welcome conflict for what it is: testimony to our individual uniqueness and the wellspring of our freedom. Conflict and controversy are often signs of the health of a community, not an index of its decay (though if space permitted, it would be important to differentiate constructive conflict that builds up, adapts, and revitalizes a community from the kind of conflict that is implicated in the collapse of social systems). In any social system (or sub-system), the fundamental resources of the community include interpretations of reality that form the conceptual framework and horizon of both thought and practice.

The inexhaustible richness of earth and world alike continually outruns or overflows any and every attempted human account. It is unquestionably the responsibility of educators to bring order to the "booming, buzzing confusion" of human experience. It is our responsibility to find the narrative threads that make the past meaningful. It is our work to identify patterns and to sort out the coherent from the incoherent. But we must be careful, even as we go about that work, to acknowledge the provisional evolving nature of our interpretations and to honor the human condition of plurality by equipping our students to deal resourcefully and fearlessly with change and variability. When human beings build systems (whether conceptual or social), there will always be anomalies—features of reality that cannot readily be fitted into the pattern. These anomalies are, usually in small ways but sometimes in major ways, threats to the integrity and sustainability of the system; fears, along with our deep desire for orderliness and control, more often than not lead us to "forget" or paper over or even falsify these signals of fragility and limitation. We want, instead, to inspire in our students the courage to acknowledge the anomalies and to read them accurately for what they can tell us about the limitations and vulnerabilities of our nonetheless indispensable convictions and social arrangements.

Coda

Conflict, disagreement, divergence in interpretation and judgment concerning the true, the good, the beautiful, and the right—these are indelible features of the human condition and the fissures in the face of peace. We cannot make them disappear. We should not even want to make them disappear, because they are part and parcel of our humanity, our creatureliness. We can, however, try to prevent them from becoming sources of destruction. We can try to prevent these fissures from turning into rifts and hostilities that break us apart and isolate us, one from another. We can try to prevent them from turning into the fractures and hatreds that destroy our peace.

The task force, in one small document, has offered our church our hope that this may be so. In a much larger way, over a much longer time, in more varied contexts, and possibly with much greater success, Lutheran colleges may also foster this hope. This, it seems to me, though I certainly see only "through a darkened glass," is how the work and learnings of the task force might contribute to reflection on "the Lutheran calling in education."

Endnotes

1. This article is derived from a paper titled "The ELCA Study on Sexuality: Lessons for the Church's Educational Mission," which was originally delivered July 31, 2005, at the conference The Vocation of a Lutheran College: The Lutheran Calling in Education, at Capital University in Columbus, OH. The conference was sponsored by the ELCA Division for Higher Education and Schools.

2. For an important argument that the apparent conflict of these distinctive ways of reasoning might be overcome by imaging the moral life interactionally in terms of man-the-answerer, see chap. 1 of H. Richard Niebuhr's *The Responsible Self.*

3. I am regretfully aware of the inadequacies of this brief paragraph. For a full and very illuminating sociological discussion of social organization, see John Bowker's rich and incisive essay "Religions as Systems." For a political treatment of the notion of "overlapping consensus" (common ground achieved in relation to, or in spite of, continuing disagreements), see John Rawls's *Political Liberalism.*

4. Fifty-eight percent of the voting members rejected a substitute motion reserving "the solemnizing and blessing of sexual unions. . . for the marriage of a man and a woman." Thirty-eight percent voted in favor of a substitute motion that would have removed *all* policy barriers "to rostered service for otherwise qualified persons in same-gender, covenanted relationships that are 'mutual, chaste, and faithful.'" The third resolution from the Church Council was affirmed by fully forty-nine percent of those voting, even though it was opposed by Lutherans Concerned (because it routed the path to ministry through a process of applying to be considered an "exception") and therefore probably lost the votes of some, perhaps many, who support the rostering of gays and lesbians in committed relationships. These votes would have been unimaginable even twenty years ago.

Works Cited

Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958.

Bowker, John Westerdale. "Religions as Systems." In *Is Anybody Out There? Religions and Belief in God in the Contemporary World*. Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1988. Reprinted from *Believing in the Church*, Report of the Doctrine Commission of the Church of England. London: SPCK, 1981.

Church Council, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. "Recommendations from the ELCA Church Council to the ELCA Churchwide Assembly on Sexuality Studies." Released April 11, 2005. http://www.elca.org/faithfuljourney/050411churchcouncil.html.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*. (As amended by the 2005 Churchwide Assembly.) http://www.elca.org/secretary/constitutions/ConstitutionsBylawsandContinuingResolutions2005.pdf.

Harrisville, Roy A., III. "A Short Response to the Report and Recommendations from the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality." Solid Rock e-mail newsletter, unnumbered release. Distributed by list-serve January 14, 2005. Archived at http://www.sldrck.org/newsletter.htm.

Macquarrie, John. *The Concept of Peace*. New York: Harper and Row, 1973.

Niebuhr, H. Richard. *The Responsible Self: An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy*. New York: Harper and Row, 1963.

Polanyi, Michael. *Personal Knowledge*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958.

Rasmussen, Larry. "Yet Another Chance To Be Lutheran: A Review of the ELCA Sexuality Studies Report." *The Network Letter* 14.1 (Lent 2005): 2–5. Reprinted under the shortened title "Yet Another Chance To Be Lutheran" (and with some slight changes in the text), *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* (on line only) 5.7 (July 2005). http://www.elca.org/scriptlib/dcs/jle/article.asp?aid=585.

Rawls, John. *Political Liberalism*. Expanded edition. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.

Schneider, Theodore. "From Our Bishop's Desk: What We've Learned about Ourselves." *Newsletter of the Metropolitan Washington, D.C. Synod*. February 2005. http://www.metrodcelca.org/2005%20Synod%20News/0502_metrolines.htm.

Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. "Report and Recommendations from the Task Force for Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Studies on Sexuality." Released January 13, 2005. http://www.elcawebstatus.org/tfreport.pdf.

ADINA NACK

Sexuality over the Lifespan—Social Trends Pose Moral Dilemmas for Communities of Faith[1]

AS A SOCIOLOGY PROFESSOR who teaches a course in sexuality at an ELCA institution, I was honored by the invitation to present to the ELCA Task Force for Studies on Sexuality. I enjoyed the interactions as both an educator and a student. I am neither a Lutheran nor a theologian, and I found it fascinating to learn about the process and outcomes of *Journey Together Faithfully, Part Two,* and about the ongoing process behind the production of *Journey Together Faithfully, Part Three*. I understood that, while homosexuality had been the primary focus of the previous document, this new document aimed to address the ELCA's position on other dimensions of sexuality.

My primary role at this meeting was that of a sexuality studies educator. As a researcher, scholar, and professor, I am also informed by past professional experiences as a sexual health educator. I view sexuality as an innate part of being human. In addition to serving the obvious function of reproduction, sexuality can be a source not only of pleasure and intimacy but also of guilt, shame, and fear. From a health education perspective, I see sexuality as a basic component of human health and well-being. From a sociological perspective, I examine how our culture shapes sexual norms (behavioral expectations) and values. I also focus on how our sexual practices transform the societies in which we live.

As we progress through our lives, each of us makes sexual decisions based on knowledge, experiences, and values. Physical changes, developmental concerns, and social factors shape our experiences of sexuality as we age. In this article, I draw on empirical research from the social, behavioral, and life sciences to highlight key findings about the learned components of sexuality from puberty through late adulthood. In particular, I will focus on three aspects of sexuality that the ELCA Task Force found to be particularly relevant and controversial for their parishioners: premarital sexuality, sexuality after divorce, and nonmarital sexuality in late adulthood. I will present some of the key research findings that pertain to these topics and conclude each section with questions that reflect concerns raised in the Task Force discussions.

Premarital Sexuality: Adolescence through Early Adulthood

From birth, we are sexual beings: we learn from our bodies what feels good or bad, and we learn from our parents, pastors, and others what is right and wrong. By the time we reach puberty, about 40% of girls and 38% of boys have masturbated (Bancroft). In addition to the sensual components of sexuality, we have also learned the gender components: the feminine and masculine norms of sexuality that tell us what is right or wrong for girls and for boys.

Sexuality in Adolescence

Biologists define *puberty* as the developmental stage in which the human body becomes capable of reproduction. Social and behavioral scientists define *adolescence* as the psychological and social

ADINA NACK *is Assistant Professor of Sociology at California Lutheran College.*

state that takes place from the start of puberty and lasts until full adult status is attained. Sexually, this is a time of growth and confusion, with the body often maturing faster than the corresponding emotional and intellectual capabilities. Hormonal changes bring about a dramatic increase in sexual interest, with increasing incidences of masturbation.

The "sexual revolution" of the 1960s marked a major shift in adolescent sexual norms, and the age of first intercourse began to decrease. By 2002, researchers found that the average age for men's first intercourse was 16.9 years old, and the average age for women's was 17.4 years old. One disturbing aspect of this trend was the report of coercive sex: about 22% of teenage girls described their first intercourse as unwanted. Another finding was the demise of a long-standing trend of female teen peer pressure to abstain from premarital intercourse. Today's teen girls are more likely than in a previous generation to encourage each other to become sexually active during their high-school years (Alan Guttmacher Institute 2002).

Today's United States teens come of age in an era of conflicting messages about sexuality: the overwhelming majority will receive abstinence-only sex education, while living in a social context where mainstream media normalizes increasingly graphic and permissive portrayals of teen sexual intercourse. While our federal government continues to increase funding for abstinence-only sex education, numerous well-respected studies have concluded that abstinence-only education does not significantly lower the age of first intercourse, reduce STDs, or reduce unintended pregnancies among teens (Contraception Report). In contrast, comprehensive or "abstinence-plus" sexuality education has been found to be highly effective (Kirby, Office of the Surgeon General), yet few United States school districts offer these curricula.

Sexuality in Early Adulthood

Young adults grapple with many developmental concerns related to sexuality: such as how to integrate love and sex, how to commit to intimate relationships, how to make childbearing decisions, and how to protect their sexual health. The post-high school years are a prime time to develop a sexual philosophy because many young adults move out of their family home to pursue educational and career goals. With this newfound freedom and independence, many young adults find themselves re-evaluating the religious standards of sexual morality with which they were raised. Studies have found that most college students expect to engage in sexual intercourse during their undergraduate years and that this sex will take place within loving relationships (Sprecher and McKinney; Sprecher 2002).

Researchers have noted several social shifts that have transformed the sexual landscape for single, young adults. In general, the past few decades have seen a sharp increase in the average age of first marriage. One reason is that more young adults are the children of divorce and do not want to rush into marriage. In addition, longer periods of education and training are required for many career options. For reasons of either self-fulfillment or economic necessity, more women want to establish their careers before marriage: it is increasingly impractical for one spouse to be the breadwinner.

Historically, young adults in the United States found it more reasonable to abstain from sexual intercourse until marriage when first marriages occurred at younger ages: the typical period of abstinence may have been only three to five years (from the end of puberty to the beginning of marital sex). This trend of later marriages has supported the normalization of premarital sex and cohabitation. Cohabitation has become a common part of young adult life, as many opt to defer marriage. Half will have cohabited by age thirty (Strong). "Living in sin," has become "living together." The moral and social sanction is nonexistent in the minds of many Americans. However, monogamy is still valued. A 2004 ABC News poll found that 80% of young singles are exclusively dating one person.

The most significant difference between cohabiting same-sex couples and heterosexual couples is that the heterosexuals can legally marry. Another key difference concerns social support for a same-sex couple's commitment to each other. While most parents of heterosexual young adults give their children a "pro-marriage" message, research finds that parents are much less likely to urge their gay or lesbian child to commit to a stable same-sex relationship (Peplau). This study found that most young adults, no matter their sexual orientation, desire an intimate, loving relationship with another person.

Today's young singles have greater sexual experience during their adolescence, feel less shame and stigma about premarital sex, and have more options to prevent unintended pregnancies. However, partly due to insufficient sex education, the United States has witnessed a rise in unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases among the young adult population. In the broader sense of sex education, sexual health educators and researchers have also noticed a disturbing trend in how young adults today approach the trajectory of sexual intimacy. Popular metaphors, such as those about baseball and advancing through the bases on the way to a "homerun" of intercourse, no longer apply to today's teens and young adults. In a world of abstinence-only education, sexual "abstinence" has become a strangely defined term. Studies reveal that oral sex has become normalized as the behavior one advances to after kissing, and that anal

intercourse is a preferable precursor to vaginal intercourse (Alan Guttmacher Institute 2000). While both of these behaviors carry considerable risk for disease transmission, many believe that their virginity is still "intact" as long as penile-vaginal intercourse has not occurred. Sexual health educators are concerned that teens and young adults are not being educated about the full range of sexual behaviors that are less risky than penetrative forms of intercourse: for example, mutual masturbation, sensual massage, and manual stimulation.

Questions to Consider:

- What role should the church play in providing sexuality education, and what type(s) of education should it provide?
- What role should the church play in advising which types of sexual activities are morally and spiritually right for young adults in dating relationships?
- With the normalization of premarital sex and cohabitation, what moral and spiritual guidance can the church offer to adults who may not marry until they are in their thirties or who may never marry?
- Should the church recognize and bless those young adults who are cohabiting and in committed monogamous relationships?

Nonmarital Sexuality: Sexuality Issues of Divorce and Single Parenthood

Our social, religious, and legal institutions continue to view marriage as the relationship in which sexuality is legitimate. However, many United States adults struggle as their sexuality is shaped by realities of divorce and/or single parenting. Demographics reveal a rise in the number of single-parent families and a growth in post-divorce singles. These adults are increasingly deciding to reenter the dating scene, only to discover that there are distinct sexual challenges.

In middle adulthood, individuals often find themselves grappling with developmental concerns such as the biological aging process. The consequences of divorce present additional challenges: stigmatization, decrease in income, and emotional distress. When children are involved, additional stressors factor into decisions to date again.

Engaging in sexual behavior with someone following a separation or divorce is significant. Sexual intimacy with a new partner symbolizes that previous vows are no longer valid. Often, the renewal of a sex life helps adults to accept their single status. However, many religious teachings do not approve of sex outside of marriage, and many divorcees feel anxious about their sexuality. Personally, they may be fearful of becoming physically and emotionally vulnerable with a new partner. Those who have had a long marriage may feel out of touch with the current norms of dating and sex. On the plus side, post-divorce sexual experiences have been linked to increased well-being (Spanier).

Single Parenting

As the results of both divorce and unmarried births, about 30% of families are headed by single parents (Fields). Familial responsibilities often mean that single parents are not part of the "singles world." They lack the leisure time and money to invest in dating. Research shows that divorced adults' sexual decisions are directly affected by the presence of children. For example, divorced women who are childless are more likely to be sexually active than those who are parents (Stack). Single parents are often concerned about the morality that they are modeling for their children.

Conscious of being role models, single parents find it more complicated when negotiating the world of dating. Social stereotypes about single men and women often include the trait of promiscuity. Many single parents do not want their children to view them as sexual beings. This results in difficult decisions about how much of their lives they can share with their dates. In particular, they face tough decisions about whether their dates will be allowed to meet their children and whether overnight dates are appropriate.

Questions to Consider:

- What role should the church play in advising which types of sexual activities are morally and spiritually right for divorced adults in dating relationships?
- Divorced adults may have financial and familial reasons for not wanting to remarry. Should the church recognize and bless committed, monogamous relationships between divorced adults?
- How should single parents determine what is right or wrong in terms of their sexual choices and the impact those choices have on their children?

Sexuality in Late Adulthood: Marital and Nonmarital Concerns

As individuals enter late adulthood, they find themselves needing to adjust to the process of aging. People may not be sexually active throughout their entire lives, but they remain sexual beings. Sexual feelings and behaviors can be healthy throughout the lifespan. Good sexual relationships can provide intimacy and human connections that help ease the pain of aging, loss of health, and loss of loved ones.

Sexual Stereotypes of Aging

In our society, we associate sexuality with youth and the ability to procreate. The sexuality of older adults tends to be invisible. Society either discounts or denies their sexuality. These beliefs contribute to a view of old age as a depressing time of life when one is unlikely to be a part of a fulfilling, intimate relationship. Negative stereotypes can also produce negative body image in older adults who may have absorbed social messages that their aging bodies are no longer "sexy."

In reality, research shows that many older adults experience high levels of satisfaction and well-being. The varied aspects of sexuality – emotional, sensual, and relational – are enjoyed regardless of age. For example, a 1998 survey conducted by the National Council on the Aging found that 66% of adults age sixty or older reported that their sex life was equal to or better than it had been when they were in their forties.

Health and Partner Availability

The most significant determinants of an older individual's sexual activity are illnesses and partner availability. Health can affect sexual behaviors in many different ways. One common example is that medications may produce "sexual side effects" that render the person less capable or incapable of experiencing sexual pleasure. In addition, increasing frailty and chronic illnesses, such as osteoporosis and heart disease, may limit mobility, strength, stamina, and/or make a person fearful of sexual exertion. Some of the normal physiological changes of aging also impact sexuality by manifesting as slower sexual response, impotency, and vaginal changes (for example, loss of elasticity and lubrication). On the flip side, physicians report that a healthy sex life can promote overall health and well-being for older adults (Cross).

Availability of partners plays a major role in how older adults experience sexuality. It is well documented that the majority of women outlive the majority of men in the United States. In contrast to older women, older men have significantly more opportunities to pursue opposite-sex relationships (Carr). Approximately four out of five women who are seventy-five or older do not have a male sexual partner. In contrast, over 60% of the men in this age group do have a partner (AARP). The consequences of this gender gap have both personal and public health ramifications. With the advent of prescription drugs (for example, Viagra) that aid male erections, older men are more sexually active than in past generations. Drug-enhanced stamina paired with the gender gap makes it likely for partner-sharing to occur, such that each older man may have two or three female sexual partners who are within his peer group. Public health problems are magnified when older men seek out the services of prostitutes and bring sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV, back to their senior girlfriends. In December 2004, a CNN televised special to commemorate World AIDS Day included a segment on the recent outbreaks of HIV/AIDS in Florida retirement communities ("Staying Alive"). Drugs like Viagra, coupled with generational norms against condom use, the absence of fertility issues, and traditional gender norms (for example, men being sexually assertive and females being sexually passive) have produced a current cohort of United States senior citizens who are at high risk for sexually transmitted infections.

Questions to Consider:

- Why are many so offended by the idea of older people wanting to be sexual?
- How might disparaging attitudes about aging and sexuality negatively impact the "golden years" of a marriage?
- What role can or should the church play in dispelling myths, building confidence, and giving older adults permission to be sexual?
- Given that many single older adults have pensions and other financial circumstances that make remarriage not a viable option, should the church recognize and bless their committed, monogamous relationships?

Conclusions

Over time throughout cultures, sexuality has been shaped by gender roles (social expectations for men and women), marital norms, and beliefs about homosexuality. Different religious texts give some guidance as to what is morally and spiritually right. The majority of Judeo-Christian writings on sexuality emphasize the sacredness of sex within the bonds of marriage and the sinfulness of infidelity. However, marriage is an ever-evolving institution, and it is vital that communities of faith consider the contemporary institution of marriage in the United States and its corresponding impact on sexuality norms and values. In discussing key sexuality issues throughout three major stages in the life-span, I have tried to illuminate some current social phenomena and hypothesize the challenges for communities of faith.

One of the difficulties in talking about sexuality – in any context – is that there is little agreement as to what constitutes "healthy sexuality." In 2002, the World Health Organization defined sexual health as "the state of physical, emotional, mental, and social well-being related to sexuality." This definition takes us beyond the mere absence of disease or dysfunction. This conceptualization requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships. The focus is not only about

the freedom from coercion, but also about the freedom to experience safe and pleasurable sexual experiences. If we are willing to consider a broader definition of healthy sexuality within the social context of contemporary trends, then communities of faith face difficult decisions. Does the pursuit of healthy sexuality put one at odds with long-standing religious doctrines? Can the church convince parishioners that modern sexual norms and values are wrong? Or, is it worth considering how religious morality can be preserved in a society with ever-evolving beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors about sexuality? I commend the ELCA for having taken a leadership role in promoting open, honest, and often difficult discussions about sexuality and look forward to reading *Journey Together Faithfully, Part Three*.

Endnotes

1. I wish to thank the members of the ELCA Task Force for Studies on Sexuality for their helpful comments and suggestions during my presentation on February 4, 2006 (Chicago, IL). Address correspondence to Adina Nack, Department of Sociology, #3800, California Lutheran University, Thousand Oaks, CA 91360-2700; e-mail: nack@clunet.edu

Works Cited

ABC News. "Primetime Live Poll: American Sex Survey." 2004. 28 Mar. 2006. http://abcnews.go.com/Primetime/News/story?id=156921&page=1.

Alan Guttmacher Institute. "Oral Sex Among Adolescents: Is It Sex or Is It Abstinence?" 2000. 28 Feb. 2006. http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/journals/3229800.html.

Alan Guttmacher Institute 2002. "Sexual and Reproductive Health: Women and Men." 2002. 28 Feb. 2006. http://www.agi-usa.org/pubs/fb_10-02.html.

American Association of Retired People. *Modern Maturity*. "Sexuality Survey." 1999. 28 Feb. 2006. http://www.aarp.org/research/reference/publicopinions/Articles/aresearch-import-726.html.

Bancroft, J., Herbenick, D., & Reynolds, M. "Masturbation as a Marker of Sexual Development." *Sexual Development in Childhood*. Ed. J. Bancroft. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2003.

Carr, D. "The Desire to Date and Remarry among Older Widows and Widowers." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 66 (2004) 1051-1057.

"Staying Alive: An MTV and CNN News Special." CNN. 01 Dec. 2004.

Contraception Report. *Adolescent Issues: Sexual Behavior and Contraception Use*. 2001. 28 Feb. 2006 http://www.contraceptiononline.org/contrareport/.

Cross, R. "What Doctors and Others Need to Know: Sex Facts on Human Sexuality and Aging." *SIEUS Report. 1993*. 7-9.

Fields, J. and Casper, L.M. "America's Families and Living Arrangements: Population Characteristics: 2000." Current Population Reports, Series 20-537. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2001.

Kirby, D. "School-Based Interventions to Prevent Unprotected Sex and HIV Among Adolescents." *Handbook of HIV Prevention*. Ed. J.L. Peterson and R. J. Di Clemente. New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum, 2000.

National Council on Aging. "Sex After 60: A Natural Part of Life." 1998. 28 Mar. 2006. http://www.nvoa.org/content.cfm?sectionID=109&detail=134.

Office of the Surgeon General. *The Surgeon General's Report on Sexual Behavior*. 2001. 28 Feb. 2006. http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/sexualhealth/.

Peplau, L. "Value Orientations in the Intimate Relationships of Gay Men." *Gay Relationships*. Ed. J. DeCecco. New York: Haworth Press, 1988.

Spanier, G. B. and Thompson, L. *Parting: The Aftermath of Separation and Divorce*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1987.

Sprecher, S., and McKinney, K. *Sexuality*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1993.

Sprecher, S. "Sexual Satisfaction in Premarital Relationships: Associations with Satisfaction, Love, Commitment, and Stability." *Journal of Sex Research* 39 (2002): 190-196.

Stack, S. and Gundlach, J.H. "Divorce and Sex." *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 21 (1992): 359-68.

Strong, B., Devault, C., Sayad, B.W., and Yarber, W.L. *Human Sexuality: Diversity in Contemporary America*. 5th ed. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2005.

World Health Organization. "Gender and Reproductive Rights : Glossary." 2002. 31 Mar. 2006. http://www.who.int/reproductive-health/gender/sexual_health.html.

RITVA WILLIAMS

Ethical Deliberation and the Biblical Text— A Lutheran Contribution to Reading the Bible

THE GOAL OF THIS PAPER is to articulate a method of ethical deliberation about a particular social issue. Over the last seven and one-half years, I have been asked many times to speak about the issue of the Bible and homosexuality, to lead workshops on the issue, and to facilitate the ELCA study *Journeying Together Faithfully*. These experiences have led to the realization that there is a great deal of confusion and misunderstanding about the nature of the Bible and the way it functions as scripture. In response I have been working at articulating a Lutheran "critical traditionalist" hermeneutic. My intention in this paper is to test this hermeneutic by using it to critique Robert Gagnon's reading of Rom. 1:18-32 and to provide an alternative reading of the same text, reflecting briefly on the theological-ethical implications of this method. Before turning to that task, however, it is necessary to explain how and why this has become an issue of importance for me by reflecting briefly on my own social location and agenda.

I am a professor and scholar of the New Testament and Christian origins at Augustana College, an ELCA liberal arts college where I hold tenure and serve as the Chair of the Religion Department. In the eyes of many this makes me an "expert." In terms of education, income, and other socio-economic indicators my profession places me in the upper middle class, a position I was not born into, but which enables me to enjoy material comforts that sometimes prick at my conscience. My relatively privileged status is further enhanced by the fact that I am a white, heterosexual, Christian wife and mother living in a country where those factors are valued (Holtmann 27-28).[1] On the other hand, I am a vertically challenged person in a world where just about every material object that we use in our day-to-day lives appears to have been designed by and for tall, taller, and excessively tall persons. Of necessity, therefore, I see and experience the world from a "different" perspective. As a female I am intensely aware of how under-represented women are in the academy and in the church, especially in leadership positions. Even when we are admitted to the inner circles, all too often we remain the "other" at the table. For me personally, this translates into a sense of liminality, of being poised at a threshold with one foot on either side. The sense of being simultaneously both an insider and an outsider is intensified by the fact that I am an immigrant twice over, having been born in Finland, raised in Canada, and now living and working as a resident alien in the United States. It is natural for me, therefore, to feel a certain affinity and empathy for persons who struggle at the peripheries of society. The combination of those feelings with a Lutheran theology of the cross has convinced me that I am called to stand intentionally in solidarity with the oppressed. Thus, I have come gradually to see my role as an educator as consciousness-raising about and advocacy for those who are marginalized. It is in context of doing just that that questions about the ethics of biblical interpretation have become significant.

A Lutheran Critical Traditionalist Hermeneutic

"Critical traditionalist" is a phrase borrowed from my Hebrew Bible professor, Dr. Robert Polzin. He originally coined the term "critical traditionalism" to label what he saw as the dominant voice within the Deuteronomistic history. He writes, "The

RITVA WILLIAMS *is Assistant Professor of Religion at Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois.*

ultimate semantic authority of the Book of Deuteronomy [...] proclaims an attitude toward the word of God that claims the right to emphasize now one aspect, viz., judgment, now another aspect, viz., mercy, of God's relationship with Israel, depending on the situation in which they find themselves" (Polzin 68). Polzin asserts that the overriding hermeneutical perspective of the Deuteronomist is that "subsequent revisionary interpretation" is not only necessary, but modeled by Moses himself in such a way that opposing views are nevertheless allowed to have their say (Polzin 205-206). Critical traditionalism, therefore, is a biblically grounded hermeneutical perspective that recognizes the need for constant revision and varying interpretations of core traditions as contexts change through space and over time.

It is my contention that Lutheran biblical hermeneutics have from their inception reflected such a critical traditionalism. For Luther, the Word of God refers in the primary sense to "the eternal Logos, the son of God" who became personally incarnate in the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth, and secondly to the proclaimed Word of God through which creation occurred and salvation was announced. The Bible as the written Word of God is "the definitive documentary on both the incarnation and oral revelation of God's Word" (Lazareth 33-34). Scripture is thus the word of God in a secondary or derivate sense (Lotz 263). Its authority derives, not so much from what it says literally, but from its ability to re-present and re-embody the life-giving Word. While it is, in Luther's words, the "queen" that "must rule, and everyone must obey," Scripture remains the servant of "the Lord who is the King of Scripture" (Lotz 264).[2] In other words, "Scripture cannot rightly be interpreted in opposition to Christ's person and work" (Lotz 263).

Given this understanding of scripture, a Lutheran critical traditionalist hermeneutic must have at least three major components to it. First, it must honor scripture as Queen of the church by taking seriously what biblical texts say, and, **even more importantly, what they mean**. One way to get at that meaning is to answer the question, "who says what to whom about what under what circumstances for what purposes." The answer necessitates paying attention, not only to the genre and rhetoric of a passage, but also to the historical, social, and cultural circumstances addressed by, reflected in, and which gave rise to it. Second, a Lutheran critical traditionalist hermeneutic must be ever mindful of Christ, who is the King of scripture, and whose mission is the purpose of the church. The good news about justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ functions as the primary criteria for deciding whether a biblical passage is relevant to our contemporary circumstances and how it might be used in teaching and preaching.

Finally, a Lutheran critical traditionalist hermeneutic holds us ethically accountable by demanding that we reflect on both the faithfulness and the consequences of our reading. Does our interpretation respect the text as articulated in its originating historical context? Does our reading and application of scripture promote the mission of Christ? What are the consequences of our interpretation with respect to race, ethnicity, economics, gender, sexuality, self-determination, and so forth? Will it be life-giving or death-dealing? For whom? Why? Indeed these may be the most important questions that we need to ask ourselves as we read, interpret, and attempt to apply scripture in our daily lives.

The Use of Romans 1:18-32 by Robert Gagnon

In *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics*, Robert Gagnon sets out to demonstrate that the Bible unequivocally defines same-sex intercourse as sin, and that there are no valid hermeneutical arguments for overriding biblical authority in this matter. His position is that "same-sex intercourse constitutes an inexcusable rebellion against the intentional design of the created order." It is not only degrading to the participants but is physically, morally, and socially destructive (Gagnon 37). Gagnon's book is, thus, not about proclaiming the gospel but about laying down the law that will protect the purity and security of the communities with which he identifies.

For Gagnon, the credibility of the Bible's stance on this subject is rooted in the revelatory authority of scripture, the witness of nature to which the Bible points, and arguments from experience, reason, and science (Gagnon 41). It is not my intention to review the entire book but to focus on Gagnon's treatment of Rom. 1:24-27, which for him is the central text on which Christians must base their moral doctrine on homosexual conduct (Gagnon 229). As he describes it, this passage is the most substantial and explicit discussion of the subject in the Bible: it is in the New Testament, it explicitly refers to lesbianism, and it occurs within a significant body of material originating from a single writer. Romans 1:24-27 is also in his estimate "the most difficult text for proponents of homosexual behavior to overturn" (Gagnon 230). For Gagnon then, this is the authoritative text because of (a) its location in the Bible specifically in the New Testament (do we detect a supersessionist theology here?), (b) its content, that is, what it says, (c) its apostolic authorship, and (d) its perceived unassailability by proponents of homosexuality.

Gagnon begins by placing the specific passage (Rom. 1:24-27) within its larger literary context (Rom. 1:18-32), which he asserts

is Paul's depiction of "what life used to be like before believing in Christ and receiving the Spirit but which has now been fundamentally transformed for those who are in Christ. It portrays the predicament of all unsaved humanity" (Gagnon 245). Within that larger context, Paul employs a typical Hellenistic-Jewish critique of gentile sin in Rom. 1:18-32 in order to set up an imaginary Jewish dialogue partner who rejects Paul's law-free gospel for Gentiles and regards Torah observance as excusing himself from God's judgment. Gagnon argues that Paul's purpose is to show that God's verdict is just and right because the Gentiles knowingly act contrary to the knowledge of God's intentions that is available to them in creation by engaging in idolatry and same-sex intercourse (Gagnon 246-47). Gagnon seeks, thus, to answer the basic exegetical question of who says what to whom about what in what circumstances for what purposes. He correctly identifies the genre of the passage as a typical Hellenistic-Jewish critique of Gentiles, but fails to explore the implications of Paul's use of such a stereotype and misconstrues Paul's audience and purpose.

Gagnon's treatment of Rom. 1:26-27 is based on drawing out the parallels between idolatry and same-sex eroticism. He asserts that just as "idolatry is a deliberate suppression of the truth available to pagans in the world around them…so too is same-sex intercourse" (Gagnon 254). What connects these two for Gagnon is Paul's use of the phrase "contrary to nature." His argument is that just as visual perception of the material world should lead to a mental perception of the God who created it, so visual perception of male-female bodily complementarity should lead to an understanding of the rightness of "natural," that is, heterosexual, intercourse (Gagnon 254-57). Gagnon contends that Paul selects homosexual conduct as "exhibit A" of culpable gentile depravity because it "represents one of the clearest instances of conscious suppression of revelation in nature by gentiles, inasmuch as it involves denying clear anatomical gender differences and functions" (Gagnon 264). While Gagnon clearly sets out the inner logic of these verses with respect to the alleged relationship of idolatry and same-sex intercourse, he fails to recognize that this logic may derive from the original Hellenistic-Jewish critique that Paul recites rather than from the purposes and intentions of Paul. Additionally his entire treatment of natural/unnatural language presupposes modern categories rather than ancient Greco-Roman ones.[3]

Returning to the larger literary context (Rom. 1:18-32), Gagnon describes Paul's rhetorical strategy as beginning with "a very clear example of unethical conduct and then…widening the net until it captures all of humanity" (Gagnon 277). According to Gagnon, Paul moves from the discussion of same-sex intercourse to a vice list (1:29-31) that is aimed mainly at Gentiles but which blurs the boundary between Gentile and Jew, and finally to the statement in 2:1-2 which targets the moral person, that is, the Torah-observant Jew. The result is a "sweeping 'sting operation'" in which the Jew who agrees with the condemnation of Gentiles in 1:18-32 is compelled by the end of chapter 3 to acknowledge that Jews deserve judgment as well (Gagnon 278). According to Gagnon, the trap that Paul sets in 1:18-32 is for those Jews who think that they can be justified in God's sight through observance of the Mosaic law and apart from faith in Christ (Gagnon 280). Since the letter is clearly addressed to members of the church in Rome, I am not sure why Gagnon thinks that Jews would have been Paul's target audience. Overall, his reading of Rom. 1:18-32 is governed by his openly avowed agenda of proving that the Bible says that all same-sex intercourse is sin and by a supersessionist theology that contains a latent anti-Judaism.

An Alternative Reading of Romans 1:18-32

I begin by asking who says what to whom about what in what circumstances for what purposes. The letter to the Romans is a communication from the apostle Paul to the church in Rome, a church which consists of both Judean/Jewish and non-Judean/Gentile (specifically Greek) members (Esler 116-119). It is a text that is addressed to **Christ-followers** (not Jews) of different ethnic backgrounds. It is the beliefs and behaviors of these groups within the church that Paul seeks to alter, in particular the ethnocentrism that each group harbors with respect to the other.[4] The effect of Paul's argumentation from chapters 1 to 11 is to put these two groups on the same footing. Neither Greek nor Judean Christ-followers can portray themselves as inherently superior to the other because both groups are equally in bondage to sin, but in different ways (Esler 144-145).[5] The only way out of their common plight is to embrace a new in-group identity, specifically the one arising from baptism into Christ (Esler 152).

It is within this context that Paul recites the information in 1:18-32, a passage that Gagnon describes as a typical Hellenistic-Jewish critique of Gentiles, but which more accurately ought to be identified as an "ethnic caricature" (Stowers 94) or an "extreme type of stereotyping" developed by certain Judeans/Jews (Esler 147). In this stereotype Gentiles, or perhaps more accurately the "heathen," (Esler 151) are portrayed as idolaters whom God has punished by "causing or allowing their decline into unnatural sexual practices (1:24-27) and antisocial vices (1:28-31)" (Stowers 92). The recognition of the genre of this particular passage should immediately cause the reader to pause. Are ethnic caricatures and stereotypes inspired by God? Does the recitation of an ethnic stereotype by a hero of faith in a biblical text make it a word of God? Can we in the twenty-first

century legitimately hold up such an ethnic caricature as the basis for developing a moral doctrine?

In light of Paul's comments in 2:1-16, I would have to answer unequivocally "No." Here Paul engages in the rhetorical technique of speech-in-character creating an imaginary interlocutor through whom Paul can criticize his audience without directly accusing anyone of anything (Stowers 103, Witherington 76). Paul's first-century audience of Greek and Judean Christ-followers would "get it." Paul's point seems to be that "whoever you are" (2:1), you are not in a position to judge, condemn, caricature, or stereotype others as if you enjoy some sort of special status. This message applies just as much to the newly saved Greeks who might imagine themselves as superior to their pagan neighbors as it might to the Judean Christ-followers who grew up socialized to view all non-Judeans as inferior.[6] Paul insists that God alone can and will judge, repaying "according to each one's deeds" (2:6). Both ethnic groups will be judged by the same criteria: those who do evil, both Judean and Greek, will experience anguish and distress; while those who do good, both Judean and Greek, will receive glory, honor, and peace (2:9-10). The same criteria applies for the heathen: on the one hand, they may instinctively do what the law requires; on the other, their conflicting thoughts may accuse or excuse them on the day of judgment (2:14-16). What Paul condemns in this passage is precisely the kind of self-righteous presumptuous stereotyping of which 1:18-32 is an example. The word of God in this passage is, thus, to be found in Paul's pronouncement of the "law," which in this case might be summarized as "go and do otherwise" (Witherington 77). His proclamation of the gospel will come later (3:21ff).

What Paul is doing in this passage, and indeed throughout much of Romans, is engaging in what might be called a critical traditionalist revision of his audience's beliefs and behavior. The challenge that Paul faced was how to build or maintain a common in-group identity (as Christ-followers) in a situation where church members were not likely to give up their existing subgroup (ethnic) identities. Was the church to be divided by ethnic distinctions or united in spite of ethnic diversity? Paul's response was to focus on the different ways both groups were equally enslaved to sin. Their common plight as sinners *coram Deo* negates any claims of ethnic superiority. The promise that God will justify the Judean "on the ground of faith" and the non-Judean "through that same faith" (Rom. 3:30) unites both groups in a new future where their ethnic identities are recognized but take second place to their shared identity in Christ where their only obligation is to "love one another" (Rom. 13:8).

A Lutheran Reading Romans Today

How might we use this reading in our conversations about sexuality? We need to begin by recognizing that Rom. 1:18-32 is an ethnic stereotype. Since Paul uses this caricature as an example of what not to do, that is, engaging in self-righteous stereotyping, how can we use its contents as the basis for a moral doctrine? How can any conclusion we might draw from it about same-sex intercourse be anything but another caricature? If Paul's goal was to subsume (not obliterate) ethnic identities under a new overarching identity "in Christ," could we perhaps find here an analogy to our situation today where the issue is not ethnic identity but gender/sexual identity?

In this paper I believe that I have tried to articulate a method (or at least a set of questions) that might guide an ethically conscious reading of scripture within the Lutheran tradition. I am calling this a "Lutheran critical traditionalist hermeneutic." It is distinctively Lutheran because it locates the authority of scripture not in the literal content of the Bible, that is, in what it says, but in what it means and in particular how that meaning re-presents and re-embodies the life-giving Word. Another way to say this is that scripture is the word of God that bears in, with, and under its human and earthly elements the Word of God. This may be the most significant difference between my reading of Rom. 1:18-32 and that of Robert Gagnon. He seems to operate out of an assumption that the authority of scripture is in what it says. This leads him to commit the common error identified by Stanley Stowers as "The acceptance of Rom. 1:18-2:29 as an objective, inductive statement of the human condition…" an error rooted in an uncritical assumption that Paul is "stating not only the truth of the gospel, but also the gospel truth" (Stowers 83). So foundational are these assumptions for Gagnon that even when he does his exegetical homework and recognizes the genre and rhetorical moves that Paul makes, he ignores their implications. In doing so, he violates the intention of Paul's argument. This is one of the great ironies that frequently emerge from an alleged insistence on locating the authority of scripture in what the Bible says. The reader becomes so obsessed with a few particular sentences or words that s/he misses the context entirely. One suspects that in situations like this the real authority actually lies in the reader since it is Gagnon's agenda that controls both the selection of the text and his reading of it. I am certainly not claiming a "virginal perception" for my own reading. I, too, have an agenda: advocacy for those marginalized by society. This is why I ask "Does my reading faithfully promote the mission of Christ? Is it life-giving or death-dealing? For whom?"

Endnotes

1. Pages 27-28 lists indicators of ascribed status in America as being male, white, able-bodied, heterosexual, Christian, and of the owning class.

2. Quotations are from Luther's 1535 *Lectures on Galatians* as cited by Lotz p. 264.

3. It is beyond the scope of this paper to go into the details, but cf. the treatments of this subject in Martti Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998) and also in Craig Williams, *Roman Homosexuality: Ideologies of Masculinity in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Oxford UP, 1999).

4. Esler pp. 40-76 provides a fine treatment of ethnicity and ethnic conflict in the ancient Mediterranean world.

5. See also Witherington 58.

6. Later in Rom. 2:17-34 Paul will redefine genuine Judean status as being rooted inwardly in the heart rather than in the external signs and rites. See Esler p. 153.

Works Cited

Esler, Philip F. *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul's Letter.* Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003.

Gagnon, Robert A. J. *The Bible and Homosexual Practices: Texts and Hermeneutics.* Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2001.

Holtmann, Linda. *Media Messages: What Film, Television, and Popular Music Teach Us about Race, Class, Gender, and Sexual Orientation.* London/New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2000.

Lazareth, William H. *Christians in Society: Luther, the Bible, and Social Ethics.* Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001.

Lotz, David W. "Sola Scriptura: Luther on Biblical Authority." *Interpretation.* July 1981: 258-73.

Polzin, Robert. *Moses and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomic History.* New York: Seabury 1980.

Stowers, Stanley K. *Rereading Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles.* New Haven: Yale UP, 1994.

Witherington III, Ben. *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary.* Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2004.

JACQUELINE BUSSIE

Scarred Epistemologies: What a Theology of the Cross Has to Say about the Gay Marriage Ban

I LIVE IN OHIO WHERE I teach religion and ethics. Ohio is one of the eleven states in the 2004 election that passed constitutional amendments effectively precluding any legal and civil recognition or institution of gay marriage. The passage of this state amendment dubbed colloquially as the "ban on gay marriage" generated much local controversy within my secular community, which has a considerable gay population, and much national controversy within the churches, including my own ELCA tradition. Locally and globally, the issue threatens to divide parish against parish, synod against synod, denomination against denomination, and perhaps most tragically as well as *de facto,* neighbor against neighbor.

In a recent article, fellow Lutheran theologian Robert Benne cites Gilbert Meilander's claim that "One couldn't support the revisionist agenda on biblical or confessional grounds; one would have to rely on social science and contemporary experience." Throughout the article, Benne expresses regret at the loss of what he terms "classical Lutheran teachings." He references Wolfhart Pannenberg, who similarly opposes "attitudes [that are] oblivious to the gravity of treating the classical tradition as optional [...]" (Benne 12). In response, as a prayerful progressive, I have begun to cast about for potential classical resources within my own tradition to address the issue. Is it accurate to claim that one cannot support gay marriage using resources from within the tradition, but instead one must uniquely use scientific and experiential resources from outside theological tradition? How should Christians view the recent ban on gay marriage? To answer these questions and respond to Benne and others of like mind, I ask two questions of my own: (1) What does a theology of the cross mean for the twenty-first century, particularly (but not exclusively) for Lutherans for whom it is a core concept? (2) What contributions does a twenty-first century understanding of the theology of the cross make to the contemporary conversation regarding gay marriage and its ban?

It is my contention that a careful reading of Martin Luther's classical notion of a *theologia crucis*—theology of the cross—provides us with theological support, grounded firmly in tradition and the gospel, for a convicted rejection of the ban on gay marriage. In Christian terms, the Defense of Marriage Act(s) are violations of agape and justice. In secular terms, the bans on gay marriage are selective discrimination, which is unconstitutional as a violation of the fourteenth amendment. Through meditations on three of Luther's Heidelberg disputation theses, I glean three corollary insights that will help prayerful Christians as they consider where to stand on the issue. Though I seek and use emphases within my own Lutheran tradition, I hope that my comments here will find resonance as well as encounter beyond denominational divides.

First, what does a theology of the cross mean to those of us Christians living today? The *theologia crucis* lies at the heart of both Lutheran theology and the Protestant Reformation. A theology of the cross, a term coined and developed by Martin Luther, reconsiders the importance of the crucified, suffering

---

JACQUELINE BUSSIE *is Assistant Professor of Religion at Capital University.* *This article first appeared in the Journal of Lutheran Ethics 5, 10 (October 2005).* http://www.elca.org/jle/article.asp?k=565

Christ for our understanding of God, and acknowledges that "the crucified Christ is himself a challenge to Christian theology" (Moltmann 3). Luther felt that the Catholicism of his day allowed the triumphalism of the resurrection to eclipse the inscrutable shame and scandal of the cross. By emphasizing the importance of the cross for Christian theology, Luther hoped to correct what he considered an imbalanced, inordinate doctrinal emphasis on the glory of the resurrection. To better understand Luther's project, imagine a balance, symbolizing both theology and the Christian attitude, with both the crucifixion and resurrection on either side. Luther felt that the preaching and action of the church (and therefore the attitudes of most Christians), tipped the scales fully in the direction of the resurrection. In the glory of Easter Sunday, in other words, the tragedy of Good Friday was lost.

Luther's theology of the cross applies a corrective to this imbalance. Because the modern reader easily forgets the original historical context, however, the name tends to mislead. The theology of the cross has often been misinterpreted, for example, to mean that Christians should neglect or forget the resurrection and focus exclusively on the crucifixion. As Luther himself would say, by no means! Such a misinterpretation led and still leads to the resurrection-blind results of despair, fatalism, cynicism, theological paralysis, and ethical quietism. Such readings have particularly upset feminists, who interpret Luther to be placing an inordinate emphasis upon redemptive suffering and a subsequent Christian need to accept illegitimate suffering and oppression. While I value these critiques, nonetheless Luther's theological *telos* was to create a balance between these two crucial christological ideas, not simply to recreate an imbalance in the other direction.

Instead Luther, in my interpretation, urges Christians to leave behind such human either/or thinking and testify to a divine, scriptural "both-and" mode of understanding the gospel. The gospel scriptures assert that Christ was both crucified and resurrected; neither is to be understood without the other. We need to understand both ideas dialectically, an approach that is, incidentally, consistent with much of feminist theory. Christians, therefore, must look at the world with a dual consciousness, holding the paradoxical "both-and" of crucifixion and resurrection before their hearts and minds as they theologize, interpret, and act in the world. For Luther, the Christian view is bifocal. In Luther's epistemology, we are to understand God in both the scandal of the cross and the glory of the resurrection. However, the resurrection does not negate the cross's scandal, nor does the cross negate the resurrection's beauty. To the world (and often even to the church) this paradox has proved a difficult burden to bear, yet God calls us to do so. Thus, Luther's theology of the cross should be understood as a methodology, not as a doctrine or dogma. It is a posture of faithfulness before both God and world.

The theology of the cross does indeed help us conceive a response to one of the most important social issues of our day, gay marriage. Specifically, a theology of the cross provides three important insights, prompted by three of Luther's remarks, which help us in our struggle to discern the will of God in such a difficult and divisive issue.

MEDITATION 1: "A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross calls the thing what it actually is."

—Martin Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation 53*

First, a theology of the cross reveals a relevant cautionary reminder that human beings, particularly in the collective, possess an ugly and dangerous proclivity toward scapegoating. Human beings tend to call things by the wrong names. By nailing Jesus to the cross, human beings, caught up in their glorious preconceived notion of the messiah as a triumphant hero, effectively label Christ as evil, as a blasphemer and a rebel. Surely the real messiah would have triumphed over his enemies and not allowed himself to be mocked! Thinking thus, the people executed Jesus, calling him a criminal. The theologian of the cross must testify to this truth, but also simultaneously to the truth of the resurrection. The resurrection revealed that Jesus was the son of God, sinless and pure, the quintessence of goodness. Yet human beings, without exception (except for a pagan!), mistakenly called Jesus "evil." Rather than humiliating human persons with this knowledge, God in an act of radical grace freely chose to allow all human beings to acquire Jesus's "alien righteousness" as their own, "The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it" (Luther 41). While the crucifixion reveals human sinfulness, the resurrection reveals God's gracefulness. A theology of the cross reminds us that instead of acknowledging our own guilt and blame, we human beings tend to deflect our own guilt on to someone else, someone who is innocent of the particular crime with which they are charged.

No doubt many might ask, what can this rhetoric possibly have to do with homosexuals? Homosexuals are sinful, and therefore must in no way be compared to our sinless Lord Jesus Christ! To which I respond yes, homosexuals are sinful, as are all human beings, gay or straight. Calling things by their right names, a theology of the cross reveals that no one is guiltless and proclaims with the apostle Paul, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). While Christ alone was innocent of all charges of sin, human beings are all guilty of

some sin or another in the eyes of God. However, not all human beings are guilty of the particular crime with which they are charged. For example, Jews during the Nazi regime were charged with being "enemies of the state," in spite of the fact that Jews in no way posed a threat to the state and were indeed less than 2% of the population. The Holocaust is indeed one of the prime historical examples of our horrifying tendency toward unjustified scapegoating. Christians and their antisemitism played an enormous role in this scapegoating. Christians persecuted Jews for centuries in Europe because of their reading of scripture: Jews were Christ-killers, plain and simple. In the wake of the Holocaust, the Lutheran church took responsibility for the church and Luther's antisemitism and issued a formal apology to our Jewish brothers and sisters. The Roman Catholic Church also issued a formal apology in Vatican II. The urgent question facing us today is: fifty years from now, will the church be ashamed of its current position toward homosexuality and gay marriage, as we have been ashamed before?

Notably, the Third Reich also charged homosexuals with being enemies of the state as they were an assault on the foundation of German society, the family. Over 100,000 homosexuals were persecuted, tortured, and/or murdered during the Holocaust. Does knowledge of historical discrimination against homosexuals make a difference in our minds about contemporary laws concerning homosexuals? Sadly, less than 25% of Americans today are aware of the fact that homosexuals were even victims in any way of the Nazis. If they had known, would it have made a difference at the polls on election day? A definitive answer to this question is not possible, though it should highlight for thoughtful Christians the dreadful potential for condemnation (labeling a group as "evil") to lead to active persecution. As is well known in the cases of people like Matthew Shepherd, homosexuals in our own country are often the victims of persecution, violence, and hate crimes. In the current American political arena, homosexuals are "charged" with "corrupting or destroying the sanctity of marriage." According to this logic, laws are needed to protect marriage. Hence in Ohio, our state legislature passed a law called the Defense of Marriage Act, an act whose very name implies that marriage needs to be defended from those who would otherwise destroy it without our preventive measures. The assumption is, of course, that marriage needs to be defended against homosexuals; hence "Issue 1" on the Ohio ballot was referred to by every form of media as "the ban on gay marriage." Are gays and lesbians indeed guilty as charged?

Here, the theology of the cross as methodology begs me to ask the question, could this accusation against homosexuals be yet another manifestation of the Christian complicity in and human tendency toward unjustified scapegoating? Could this condemnation of homosexuals as the source of the corruption of marriage be a classic case of the egregiously mistaken human tendency to call the good evil and the evil good, at least in part? Both at the level of intentionality and action, I cannot find any empirical evidence that gay marriage destroys the sanctity of marriage.

And what of scriptural evidence? Though an in-depth biblical study is beyond the scope of this essay, in all seven references to what contemporary readers term homosexuality, the Bible speaks only of same-sex acts, never of sexual orientation let alone gay marriage, a possibility never entertained by the biblical writers. The Bible does speak negatively of same-sex acts, referring to them as unnatural. Is it then the unnaturalness of certain sex-acts that corrupts marriage? What constitutes an unnatural sex-act? Anal sex? What of oral sex? Do American Christians consider these acts are unnatural? Is it then that particular sex-acts corrupt marriage? But what of the gay couples who perform none of these "unnatural" sex-acts (and yes, there are plenty of people who fall into this category)? Aren't heterosexual couples who engage in "unnatural" sex-acts like oral sex destroying the sanctity of marriage? If so, countless people, including innumerable Christians, stand indicted. Where are the additional laws needed to protect marriage from these sorts of attacks from within? Why can heterosexuals engage in all these "corruptions" of marriage and more, with impunity? Are heterosexual marriages permitted because they are sinless, and homosexual marriages prohibited because they are sinful? What straight Christian could claim before God that their marriage is sinless?

Do heterosexuals bear no blame at all for the crumbling of marriage in America? I fear that the scapegoating of homosexuals for marriage's corruption can lead American heterosexual Christians down this path of no accountability, to a theology of righteousness which bears no resemblance to a theology of the cross. Jesus, after all, in the book of Matthew, suggests that *divorce* —not homosexuality, which Jesus never condemns—is an assault on the sanctity of marriage. Mark 10:11: "He answered, 'Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.'" Jesus could not have been more correct in labeling that which indisputably corrupts the sanctity of marriage: marriage's dissolution. Sanctity means holy or sacred, religiously binding, and inviolable. Christian divorce violates the inviolable, tearing apart with human hands and deeds what God has bound together. Jesus's assertion has the added flourish of being both rationally and empirically verifiable—surely the tragic death of every marriage is an assault on marriage's supposed inviolability and sanctity.

As a heterosexual theologian of the cross, I feel compelled to call things by their right names. To use Luther's terms of good and evil, divorce is evil, if by evil we mean that which destroys marriage. The legalization of divorce in this country goes directly against the very words uttered by the lips of our Lord. However, most churches, innumerable Christians, and the American legal system have determined (I think understandably) that divorce is, at times, a *necessary* evil, a last resort. Yet where is the moral outrage over such legalization? Divorce is for many, a regrettable exception to the norm. For many thoughtful Christians, divorce is an exception grounded in the reality and inescapability of human sinfulness. For still others, however, divorce is simply a no-fault agreement. Some heterosexuals marry three, four, even five times in a lifetime, in clear violation of the Ohio state constitutional amendment that states, "Only a union between *one* man and *one* woman may be a marriage valid in or recognized by this state and its political subdivisions." In practice, the state clearly recognizes not one, but multiple successive marriages for heterosexuals as valid. Why aren't Christians concerned about the fact that there is absolutely no limit on the serial monogamy of heterosexuals, who could feasibly be married and remarried twenty times in one lifetime, while living in one state? The "gay marriage ban" isolates homosexuals as the only persons who are both unmarriageable and corruptors of marriage's sanctity.

Divorce, however, fortunately can and never will be prescriptive for Christians. We do not wish for all to be divorced. Similarly, gay marriage can never be prescriptive, in the sense that prayerful progressives do not wish for all marriages to be gay unions. Many prayerful progressives are *not* arguing for homosexuality to become universal behavior—any more than they are pushing for divorce to be universal. Prayerful progressives' arguments must not be summarized with this straw-man fallacy. No, prayerful progressives like myself are pointing to a double standard that may very well rely on a theology of glory—the naïve triumphalism of heterosexual Christians that they have successfully sustained the sanctity of marriage, despite all evidence to the contrary. Prayerful theologians of the cross might ask the question, can the Christian church conceive of homosexuality as a legal exception to the Christian norm, just like divorce? That is, acceptable and even celebrated by some who consider it sinless, regrettable to others who consider it sinful but acceptable as a necessary evil because of the omnipresence of human sinfulness—but however you slice it, perfectly *legal?* No good reason why this compromise is not possible, particularly from the standpoint of justice, has been presented. As things currently stand, many might appositely accuse Christians of inconsistency, pushing as they have for laws ostensibly honoring one part of the biblical text (homosexuality) while completely conceding to secular values on the other (divorce). The prayerful progressive position advocates with consistency for acceptance of both exceptions.

MEDITATION 2: "Although the works of man always seem attractive and good, they are nevertheless likely to be mortal sins....Without the theology of the cross, men misuse the best in the worst manner."

—Martin Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation 43,55*

The second insight the theology of the cross grants to the Christian struggling to take a stand on the issue of gay marriage is the notion that our epistemologies are deeply wounded. At our very best, without exception, an authentic consideration of the crucifixion demands that we recognize that we employ scarred epistemologies. What does this mean? To answer, we must also discuss the theological anthropology suggested by a theology of the cross. In effect we must answer two questions here: Who are human beings, and how does this affect what we know?

According to Luther, Christians are embodied paradoxes. That is to say, looking at the world through the bifocal lens of the crucifixion and resurrection shows us that human beings are *simul justus et peccator*. This Latin phrase means that all Christians who truly understand the gospel and the theology of the cross understand themselves in a strange manner—that is, as persons who are simultaneously righteous and sinful. Christians are justified sinners, righteous sinners, rendered righteous not by a single word or deed of their own but instead only through the righteousness of Christ. "It is the sweetest righteousness of God the Father that he does not save imaginary, but rather, real sinners, sustaining us in spite of our sins and accepting our works and our lives which are all deserving of rejection, until he perfects and saves us [...] we [...] escape his judgment through his mercy, not through our righteousness" (Luther 63).

Luther urges us to understand that human beings' existence as *simul justus et peccator* dramatically affects both our knowledge and our actions. This calls for a radical reversal in human thinking, which typically feels more comfortable in a theology of glory, because it permits the fanciful notion that some individuals stand on a pure and moral high ground. Instead, Luther's theology of the cross suggests that neither can be without ambiguity. To make this point abundantly clear, Luther quotes Eccles. 7:20, "Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins," and Ps. 143:2, "No man living is righteous before thee." No thought, understanding, belief, action, or institution is ever untainted by human sin. Sin permeates all,

even Christians, churches, marriage, and biblical interpretations. Thus in Moltmann's terms, for Luther, Christ "is a scandal even for Christian theology" (Moltmann 3).

In the realm of epistemology, sin's ubiquity suggests that no human being can claim full knowledge of God's will. A theology of the cross simultaneously testifies to our deep intimacy and connectedness with God but also to our radical disconnection and alienation from God. It is not one or the other, but always both. Practically, this means whether I am a progressive or a conservative, indeed whatever my position, a theology of the cross necessitates that I adopt a position of self-critique. Luther reminds us, "Arrogance cannot be avoided or true hope be present unless the judgment of condemnation is feared in every work" (Luther 48). In shorthand, a theology of the cross urges us to ask about even our noblest enterprises such as ethical decision-making: Could I be wrong? No one can corner the market on God's will and truth. A theology of the cross introduces the scary truth of fallibility, stated scripturally in Romans as "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). On this issue, scripture is surprisingly unambiguous, "For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all" (Rom. 11:32).

No doubt many of my fellow Christians will counter that the will of God is clear and unambiguous and is preserved in the word of God. If the Bible were without ambiguity, however, Christians would not be plagued with these discussions. As only one case in point, while the Bible says thou shalt not kill, it also admonishes the chosen people of God to slaughter the Canaanites without mercy in warfare. Such is the basis of our current debates on war. Similarly, though some biblical passages condemn same-sex acts, particularly in the Old Testament, other biblical passages seem potentially to trump this injunction--for example, Gal. 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus," to which we could conceivably add "gay and straight." In the midst of this ambiguity, a theology of the cross reminds us of the difficult truth that even biblical interpretation, tainted as it is by human sin like every other human endeavor, is and can be guided by human agendas rather than divine ones.

Vast historical evidence corroborates this insight. Christian pastors and parishioners, for example, used their skewed reading of the Christian Bible as their primary source for supporting slavery. The Bible appears to support slavery, yet no American Christian supports this interpretation today. We consistently reinterpret the Bible in light of our culture, but many act as if we are just doing this for the first time in the case of homosexuality. A more recent and perhaps relevant example occurred in 1998 in South Carolina, where state legislators realized that a law banning interracial marriage was still on the books. At that time, a Christian senator stood up on the senate floor and stated that based on his Christian beliefs and the Bible, he believed interracial marriages were an abomination to God and man. Our laws obviously once shared this senator's viewpoint that miscegenation was a corruption of marriage's sanctity. However, since 1967, state interracial marriage bans have been declared unconstitutional under the fourteenth amendment. (This raises the question: why does race qualify under the equal protection clause but not sexuality?) A majority of Christians once shared this senator's views as well, though now they no longer do. Clearly these former "Christian" positions were guided by human agendas and not divine ones, but very few people realized this at the time. A theology of the cross, however, reminds us all that such interpretations are likely. Could the same human agendas of prejudice be at stake in the gay marriage debate over reinterpretation of scripture? Given my understanding of our scarred epistemologies, I cannot and do not claim absolute truth for my position. Instead, I respectfully offer it up to thoughtful Christians, especially within the ELCA, for their consideration as a countervoice to the mainstream.

A theology of the cross therefore reminds of our beautiful need of one another, what I term our *dialogical need of the other.* A theology of the cross suggests that human beings need one another, to call one another up short and help us to discern the log in our own eye to which we are blind, busy as we are finding the sty in everyone else's. In our blindness, only God, working through our neighbors and their *agape,* can help. The point of such difficult discussions is not to claim that nothing can be said, but for Christians to enter into dialogue about their interpretations, serving as necessary critics of one another with those on the opposite side of the spectrum.

Sin, therefore, is a great equalizer. But perhaps you are asking, are Christians then completely unable to make absolute truth claims, left with nothing but relativism? A theology of the cross suggests that we can and must still speak, yet we must confess that our claims are provisional. Undoubtedly this thought makes many people uncomfortable, and they would see such a claim as a curse and a sell-out. I can only remind these dialogue partners that on Good Friday, we condemned Christ as a criminal and blasphemer. Even his own disciples betrayed, denied, and abandoned him. Thankfully, however, we have a forgiving God. On the basis of grace, God overturned our judgment of Christ and instead passed his own. God's judgment, importantly, did not resemble our own in the slightest, but instead was its opposite. A theology of the cross reminds me that only God judges (crucifixion) and only God saves and redeems (resurrection). Nothing that human beings do or say or even believe earns them salvation—only a theology of glory would believe such a

thing. Says Luther, "The person who believes that he can obtain grace by doing what is in him adds sin to sin so that he becomes doubly guilty" (Luther 50).

The concept of being saved by grace lies at the core of Lutheran teaching, and with Luther, I believe it is a relief that I am not saved by my own merit or my own judgments. I therefore interpret the provisionality of human truth claims to be a blessing, and not a curse. Such knowledge of provisionality leaves room for the Holy Spirit to work in the world and for God to be alive and sovereign, working through and in human beings to provide human life with future revelation of Godself. The provisionality of human truth claims, even moral and theological ones, leaves room for the resurrection to happen. If human labels and judgments were definitive, there would be no Resurrection, and no resurrections. In the face of God, I cannot claim absolute knowledge. I can only speak and act as the Spirit guides me, and as a theologian of the cross that means with deep humility and consciousness of my own fallibility.

Even though we will undoubtedly err in our biblical interpretations and subsequent social ethics, my principle of selectivity is the scriptural Christ-given principle of *agape* found in Mark 12:31: "'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." When faced with ambiguity as in the situation of homosexuality, I choose as a theologian of the cross to err on the side of *agape*, understanding that if God's judgment one day proves me wrong (crucifixion,) we also have a loving and forgiving God (resurrection.) As contemporary Christians, we must confess our principles of selectivity as well as our selective literalism. After all, how many of us stone children to death when they curse their parents, as Exod. 21:17 commands? How many of us do as Christ instructed in Mark 10:21 and sell all that we have and give it to the poor?

Wherever selective literalism is unconfessed and unacknowledged, as it commonly is in contemporary discussions of gay marriage, a theology of the cross cautions that a human prejudicial agenda could be at work. A theology of the cross implies that God's justice compels me to also act for justice in the world. From the standpoint of justice toward homosexuals, I must ask, on what possible biblical basis can we ban *exclusively* homosexuals from the civil institution of marriage? As things currently stand, they are the only consenting adults not permitted to marry by law. But scripturally, are those who commit same-sex acts the only "sinners"? Surely not! What of murderers? Can they marry? The answer is yes, in every state, even if they are behind bars.[1] What of other biblical sinners of a more sexual nature, such as adulterers, can they marry? Can rapists marry? Can child molesters and abusers get married, and therefore have children? Can persons convicted of domestic violence against a spouse marry? Clearly adulterers, rapists, child molesters, and spousal-abusers undeniably violate the sanctity of marriage; what sane person would argue otherwise? But can all of these persons (criminals, actually) legally marry? Yes, yes, yes, and yes. As long as one is heterosexual in America and a consenting adult, marriage is yours for the taking, and abusing.

As a theologian of the cross who calls things by their right names, when I look at the current legislation banning same-sex marriage, I can think only of Martin Luther King Jr.'s definition of an unjust law. In the *Letter from Birmingham Jail,* King defines an unjust law as "a code that a numerical or power majority group compels a minority group to obey but does not make binding on itself. This is difference made legal" (King 430). Letter for letter, the current gay marriage ban qualifies as an unjust law according to Dr. King. My conscience therefore condemns the gay-marriage ban with my very being, as there is no denying that it is a law passed by a power majority group on a minority group which is not binding for itself. Far be it from us as Christians to support injustice, analogous to the way many Americans Christians were blind to the injustice of race relations for decades. As an American citizen, I can only think of our legal system, which deems unconstitutional any and all laws that target only one specific group and deny them equal rights. Both a theology of the cross and the Constitution condemn acts of discrimination. Martin Luther and his namesake Dr. King stand united on this issue. Justice is the concern of theology and of Christians just as surely as it is the concern of every American citizen. I ask myself, how could such a violation of justice have passed, primarily with the support of Christians who claim to seek justice?[2]

A theology of the cross implies that God's justice compels me to also act for justice in the world.

The gay marriage ban therefore does just what it purports to do: exclusively targets homosexuals and stigmatizes them as unworthy of marriage. In supporting such a ban, the Christian churches participate in injustice, albeit perhaps unwittingly and in the very name of justice—but the theology of the cross forewarns us of such irony. By supporting this ban, the churches tacitly ignore other marital issues in which one person would concede that they are hurt by the other—spousal abuse and rape, child molestation, and adultery. (Notably, in gay unions, both parties claim not only to not be hurt, but to flourish.) What kind of message do we send to our young people by isolating our marital laws and our support of such laws to homosexuality? We

send the message that as the body of Christ, we do not condemn rape, adultery, domestic violence, murder and child abuse as *corruptions of marriage*. Only being gay matters; only homosexuality corrupts marital covenants. Have we unreasonably isolated a "sin" that is easy to categorize as "other"—the "sin" of being gay—in order to protect ourselves and our presumed righteousness? Are we afraid to condemn behaviors that are not conveniently isolatable to a group to which most of us do not belong? After all, homosexuality is not a behavior which tempts heterosexuals; behaviors such as anger, mistreatment of our spouse and adultery, on the other hand, are real temptations for all of us. If we condemn these too loudly, are we afraid of condemning ourselves? A theologian of the cross must wonder here if a theology of glory is at work. When will we at last call things by their right names?

MEDITATION 3: "That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened."

—Martin Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation 52*

The third and final insight offered by a theology of the cross regards God. Because God cannot be fully known by us, this section is of necessity the shortest of my three sections, yet perhaps most noteworthy. We human beings ask, who is God? And a theology of the cross answers: God is Immanuel, that is, God with us. For Luther, the strangeness of the gospel tale lies primarily in the fact that God was present in such a humiliating place such as the cross. He writes, "Now it is not sufficient for anyone, and it does him no good to recognize God in his glory and majesty, unless he recognizes him in the humility and shame of the cross. Thus God destroys the wisdom of the wise, as Isaiah 45:15 says, 'Truly, thou art a God who hidest thyself'" (Luther 52-53).

The incarnation and crucifixion imply, therefore, that God can be found anywhere—absolutely anywhere. This insight, Luther well recognized, is simultaneously scandalous and beautiful. On the one hand, it means that no place is so remote that God is not present. In suffering, death, grief, radical doubt, and even murder, God—Immanuel—is there. On the other hand, this insight means that human beings cannot discern, let alone limit where God's grace is at work and where it is not. Indeed, a theology of the cross states that the work of God's grace is invisible to the human eye and therefore can be seen only with the eyes of faith which hopes in things unseen.

A theology of the cross also reveals that God judges and condemns (crucifixion) and saves and redeems (resurrection.) God is both judge and redeemer; human beings are ultimately neither for they tend to misjudge and have no power to redeem. All human institutions and endeavors thus stand under both God's judgment and God's redemption. Because we cannot think the resurrection without the cross, however, we are reminded that the redemption of the world is proleptic and paradoxical. That is, it is already but not yet. Until the *eschaton*, God uses the raw materials of this world, including human beings, as vehicles of his grace and justice.

Who is responsible for sanctifying a marriage? According to Luther and a theology of the cross, God alone sanctifies marriage. Human beings and their actions cannot sanctify or bless their own marriages. This gives new meaning to Matt. 19:6, "What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder." A theology of the cross insists that human beings cannot domesticate God and limit God's sovereignty or workings of grace in any way. Marriage, in the sacramental view of most churches, can function as a vehicle of God's grace to human beings, should God choose to bless the marriage in this way. That being said, do heterosexual Christians dare to have the audacity to claim that God cannot and will not ever choose to use gay marriage and love to extend his grace to human beings? Who are we to limit God in such a way? Who are we to limit the possibility of grace in advance for other human beings through our laws? Can we say that God cannot join together homosexuals? A theology of the cross cautions against such human domestication of God's sovereignty, particularly because human beings, given the choice, would certainly have denied that God could use the scandal of a criminal's execution on the cross to work his grace on the entire world. God's logic is not our logic. A theology of the cross reveals that considering the two conflatable is pure folly. In the words of C.S. Lewis, God is the great iconoclast. This must not be forgotten.

In conclusion, my essay disproves the claim that one has to rely exclusively on social science and contemporary experience and not the Lutheran tradition in order to argue for the acceptance of gay marriage. Using the theology of the cross, an idea that lies at the heart of the Lutheran tradition, I have shown an alternative interpretation of the issue. Before God, I assert my theology and resulting social ethic with great fear and trembling, in the knowledge that my epistemology is scarred. Before God, I cannot claim to know if my own position is sinful or just, though like all human endeavors according to a theology of the cross, it is probably an admixture of both. If my dialogue partners cannot confess the same of their own positions, have they truly heard the message of the cross? Before human beings, I must confess that my conscience convinces me that anti-homosexualism is the last acceptable prejudice in this country. That homosexuals are humiliated on a daily basis and stigmatized as being the *only* segment of our society unworthy of the blessings of marriage, of this

there is no doubt. While some would argue that this humiliation is well deserved and brought on by choice and by guilt, I cannot avoid considering the alternative possibility that this humiliation is brought on by scapegoating and unconfessed human agendas of political self-interest and spiritual self-righteousness. In this regard I ask to be heard, and invite responses. I close by encouraging my fellow Christians, whatever their views, to remember that the authentic desire to discern God's will for the people of God provides a common ground all Christians, be they "prayerful progressives" or "compassionate conservatives." Where this insight is lost, no authentic dialogue is possible.

Endnotes

1. Notably, the U.S. Supreme Court in *Turner vs Safley* ruled in 1987 that prisoners were allowed to get married, citing marriage as a fundamental civil right (Turner).

2. No doubt at this point many protest that under this reasoning, polygamy, too, should be permitted. For surely the defense of marriage acts also discriminate against those minority groups who seek polygamy. To this rebuttal, I have two brief responses. First, I can only point out that those who seek polygamy have a strong scriptural basis for their actions—i.e. models of the faith such as Abraham had multiple wives. This of course only proves my point that everyone, whether they confess it or not, consistently interpret the Bible selectively according to their own community and standards. Second, however, polygamy is to be rejected by Christians because it is inherently discriminatory and a violation of justice. Polygamy, it should be noted, also qualifies for an unjust law using Dr. King's definition. Those who seek polygamy mean by the term both in concept and in praxis the practice of having multiple wives. At no time do they mean the practice of having multiple husbands (for which there is no scriptural precedent.) While many men would love to have multiple wives, how many of those same men would be willing to share their wife with countless other men? Men who seek polygamy have no intention of sharing such privileges with women. Again I can only quote the Christian minister Dr. King, *this is difference made legal.*

Works Cited

Benne, Robert. "Reinventing Sexual Ethics." *First Things* 121 (March 2002): 11-13.

King Jr., Martin Luther. "Letter from Birmingham Jail." April 16, 1963. *From Christ to the World.* Eds. Wayne Boulton, Thomas Kennedy, and Allen Verhey. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994.

Luther, Martin. "Heidelberg Disputation." *Luther's Works* 31. Ed. Harold J. Grimm. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1957. 39-70.

Moltmann, Jurgen. *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*. Trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993.

Turner v. Safley. 482 US 78. US Supreme Ct. 1987.

ROBERT BENNE

What *Could* the Lutheran Colleges and Universities Contribute to the ELCA Discussion of Sexuality—But What *Would* They Actually Contribute?

THE CHURCHWIDE ASSEMBLY of the ELCA took on some tough sexuality issues during its August 2005 meeting in Orland, Florida. It voted to continue under the guidance of the 1993 Bishop's Statement that there were no grounds in scripture or tradition for blessing gay or lesbian unions, but at the same time it refused to provide for the discipline of those who ignored that guidance. A narrow majority voted down the provision for the ordination of partnered gays and lesbians through an exceptional process. However, such a provision would have required a two-thirds majority since it would have meant constitutional changes.

The preassembly Sexuality Task Force and Church Council ducked the normative question that has to be answered by the newly constituted Task Force: are there adequate biblical and theological grounds for lifting the age-old and near-universal Christian proscription of homosexual conduct, even if it occurs in committed same-sex pairs? The clear answer to that question may lead to a church split, especially if the ELCA answers the question affirmatively.

The question before us is this: Would the active involvement of college and university faculties in this possibly church-dividing conflict be helpful? What I would hope for in answering that question is far different from what I think would happen.

What I would hope for goes something like this: I would hope for a balanced mixture of what James Davison Hunter calls the "orthodox" and "progressive" perspectives among the faculty of the religion and social science departments on the issues being dealt with by the ELCA. (By "progressive" Hunter means those who believe we ought to revise or reject central tenets of received moral tradition according to the enlightened opinion of the day, informed as it is by contemporary experience and practice. On the other hand, the "orthodox" believe that these central tenets are settled moral truths that have been revealed in the tradition and therefore cannot be compromised by even the most enlightened opinion of the day.) Between those poles would be a segment of the faculty who would occupy a middle ground on these contested sexuality issues.

Given this sort of balance, the Lutheran colleges could actually model fair discourse on something as volatile as the subject of homosexuality. Theological ethicists from both sides would be invited to make their best arguments, realizing that a moral tradition of two thousand year duration and of near universal acceptance among the major Christian churches would need overwhelming arguments and evidence against it to call it into serious question. In other words, traditional moral teaching would be given the benefit of the doubt and treated with high respect.

The social sciences would evenhandedly marshal the huge amount of new research on marriage, divorce, gay and lesbian unions, cohabitation, sexual abuse, and family life. Where our culture is heading on these issues would be presented from

ROBERT BENNE *is the Director of the Center for Religion and Society at Roanoke College and Professor and Chair in the Department of Religion and Philosophy.*

various ideological perspectives, but there would be a search for reliable empirical material that all sides would consider accurate. The many other disciplines could enter the conversation from their perspectives. And, of course, students would be invited to listen in and participate in appropriate ways.

Perhaps the conversation would not—and maybe should not—lead to a definitive conclusion. But such fair moral discourse could be funneled into the larger church discussion in the many ways already provided by the ELCA. Perhaps colleges could publish articles and books on these issues similar to what the seminaries did.

That is my idyllic expectation of how a Lutheran college faculty might carry on fair moral discourse. But such a marvelous thing is not likely to happen because the preponderance of "progressives" in the academy is so large that real moral discourse would be nearly impossible. That majority, reflecting American elite opinion in general, is so hefty that its opinions have often taken on the characteristics of unchallengeable truths. These "truths" are so deeply assumed by the majority that they no longer need to be argued; any intelligent person of good will would hold them. Those who depart from that alleged consensus are then considered to be neither intelligent nor goodwilled. Indeed, the "dissenters" are then often met with derision while those of the majority opinion are cheered on, sometimes literally so. Such an atmosphere tends to intimidate minority opinion and squelch debate.

I have much anecdotal evidence for the truth of such an analysis since I have been often in the minority in the academy and elite levels of the church on sexuality issues, as well as on political and other cultural issues. However, it is easy to move to other contexts where the deep-running assumptions are just the opposite. Neither situation makes for good debate. The academy, however, is definitely in the hands of the "progressives."

The famous research by Klein, Stern, and Western[1] indicates a ratio of more than ten to one in favor of liberals over conservatives in six nationwide social science and humanities associations. Political and cultural liberalism are not exactly correlated but there are some pretty strong convergences. Earlier studies done on Lutheran colleges suggest that they are more liberal than other private colleges. My hunch is that few Lutheran colleges would have a healthy balance between "orthodox" and "progressive" faculty on these hot-button sexuality issues. The imbalance would be sufficient to make debate very difficult. The great majority would wade in on the "progressive" side and merely reinforce the already progressive views of the seminaries and the national level of the ELCA.

Of course, if you believe that the "progressives" have the right "take" on this matter you might cheer this kind of contribution on the part of the colleges and universities. But such a one-sided contribution would not help the ELCA come to a careful judgment that both respects the Great Tradition and the challenges presented by the modern world.

But hold on. It **would** be possible to gather a fair balance of perspectives from across the colleges and universities that could indeed enrich this weighty debate. However, it would take the wisdom of Solomon and the courage of St. Paul to do the selection and the gathering. Thus far the ELCA has not been able to gather the proper balance for such fair moral discourse. Maybe the colleges and universities could actually pull off such a gathering. But who would do the selecting, the gathering, and the hosting?

End Note

1. For a summary of the findings see "National Survey Finds Academe Politically Imbalanced." *NAS Update* 14.2 (2005): 9. The fuller study is published as Daniel B. Klein, Charlotta Stern, and Andrew Western, "Documenting the One-Party Campus," *Academic Questions* Winter (2004-2005): 40-52.

ELCA College & Universities

Augsburg College | MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA
Augustana College | ROCK ISLAND, ILLINOIS
Augustana College | SIOUX FALLS, SOUTH DAKOTA
Bethany College | LINDSBORG, KANSAS
California Lutheran University | THOUSAND OAKS, CALIFORNIA
Capital University | COLUMBUS, OHIO
Carthage College | KENOSHA, WISCONSIN
Concordia College | MOORHEAD, MINNESOTA
Dana College | BLAIR, NEBRASKA
Finlandia University | HANCOCK, MICHIGAN
Gettysburg College | GETTYSBURG, PENNSYLVANIA
Grand View College | DES MOINES, IOWA
Gustavus Adolphus College | ST. PETER, MINNESOTA
Lenoir-Rhyne College | HICKORY, NORTH CAROLINA
Luther College | DECORAH, IOWA
Midland Lutheran College | FREMONT, NEBRASKA
Muhlenberg College | ALLENTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA
Newberry College | NEWBERRY, SOUTH CAROLINA
Pacific Lutheran University | TACOMA, WASHINGTON
Roanoke College | SALEM, VIRGINIA
St. Olaf College | NORTHFIELD, MINNESOTA
Susquehanna University | SELINSGROVE, PENNSYLVANIA
Texas Lutheran University | SEGUIN, TEXAS
Thiel College | GREENVILLE, PENNSYLVANIA
Wagner College | STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK
Wartburg College | WAVERLY, IOWA
Wittenberg University | SPRINGFIELD, OHIO

intersections

Augustana College
639 38th Street
Rock Island, IL 61201-2296