

## Identity Theft: “Lutheran”

By Rev. Joshua Scheer

There it was, the headline read “Lutherans to vote on sexually active gay clergy” on FOXnews.com. Being a member of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LCMS), the second largest Lutheran church body in America, I am fairly used to having things that “Lutherans” do in the news not mean the LCMS. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is the largest Lutheran church body in the United States, so when the news reports things “Lutheran”, it often goes for statements from ELCA theologians, pastors, or members. My synod is not usually contacted. Being a sinful human being, I first thought of myself and the troubles this will create for me and my congregation. After that I realized my own holy disgust for how the Word of God is being ignored and manipulated on the matter, but then I thought for a second about my neighbors in the ELCA.

One day later, I have just read the news that the ELCA report on Human Sexuality has been approved by a vote of 676-338. This report allows for the belief that same gender relationships are tolerable in the church and indeed should even be supported. From the report: “It [the church] has called upon congregations and members to welcome, care for, and support same-gender couples and their families, and to advocate for their legal protection.”<sup>1</sup> This is in direct opposition to the Word of God, which asks us to lovingly call our neighbors out of sinful behavior and apply the forgiveness of God to enable them to do so. What if the prophet Nathan had told David that it was alright for him to have Bathsheba in a loving, committed relationship? Instead, God sent Nathan to rebuke the King and took away the son that was the product of David and Bathsheba’s sin.<sup>2</sup> What did our Lord Himself tell the woman caught in adultery? “Go and sin no more.”<sup>3</sup> He did not seek to “welcome, care for, and support” the woman in her sin. Instead He lovingly called her out of it. Being stuck in sin is deadly to the soul, that is why our Lord so graciously sought out our first parents Adam and Eve to point out their sin and give them the promise of forgiveness in Jesus Christ, the Promised Seed.<sup>4</sup>

One of the arguments for the position is that there are people who are conscience bound to their view. Again from the report: “On the basis of conscience-bound belief, some are convinced that the scriptural witness does not address the context of sexual orientation and lifelong loving and committed relationships that we experience today.”<sup>5</sup> Conscience is a device that tells us whether our actions or plans of action are right or wrong based upon information we have on hand. For the Christian, we seek to have our consciences informed by the Word of God. It is impossible with the sinful nature clinging so tight to maintain a perfectly informed conscience. A seared conscience can be the result of a bad base of information, or in regularly going against the good information. It is precisely for that reason that we sinful creatures with often ill-informed consciences are put into relationship with our neighbors. We are to admonish and rebuke one another with the Word of God. Ironically, even the “Frequently Asked Questions on Bound Conscience”<sup>6</sup> found on the ELCA website gives the example of Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms: “Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason... I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God” It is ironic because the Word of God is cited by Luther as useful for and having the power to change the bound conscience, where the ELCA report encourages toleration of the falsely bound conscience. We are to warn a brother or sister in the faith when we see them going astray. After all, their conscience may be ill-informed and they may be being misled. This means we look out for one another. The ELCA report basically says that we shouldn’t look out for one another, but instead tolerate whatever each person’s conscience says, regardless of whether it is Scriptural or not.

Many of the readers of this article have been in the ELCA since its formation, and many have been a part of the LCA or ALC prior to that. Who could have seen this coming? How far can a church body go away from its own members? How can the simple words of Scripture be so misused? How can the name “Lutheran” be attached to such abominable beliefs? These are all good questions, to which I am sure many ELCA members will now have to consider. I know as a member of LCMS I now have a lot of questions also. How did I not serve to lovingly

warn my neighbors in the ELCA about this? Where have I kept silent when I should have spoken? How can I now act in love as so many are hurting and feeling left behind? How has it gotten to the point that when I tell others that I am a Lutheran that I have to qualify it as not being the type that supports homosexuality? How will I be a pastor to my own parishioners, who no doubt have friends, family, and neighbors that are affected by these sad actions of the ELCA assembly? Sad times cause many questions to be asked, and let's all be honest – there is much repentance to be had on all sides, amongst all Lutherans. May God grant true repentance to all of those who still brandish the name “Lutheran”.

I sympathize with all of those lifelong Lutherans who have just now been lumped into a group that no longer believes as the Bible teaches in regards to homosexuality. It is a case of identity theft on a grand scale. An entire church body and all those bearing the “Lutheran” name will be greatly affected by this report's false teachings.

---

<sup>1</sup> “*Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*” hereby referred to as *HSGT*, page 17, lines 615-616.

The document can be found at:

<http://www.elca.org/~media/Files/What%20We%20Believe/Social%20Issues/In%20Process/Human%20Sexuality/hsgt.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> See 2 Samuel 11, 12.

<sup>3</sup> See John 8:11.

<sup>4</sup> See Genesis 3:15.

<sup>5</sup> *HSGT*, page 18, lines 652-654

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Social-Statements-in-Process/JTF-Human-Sexuality/Report-and-Recommendation/FAQs-Bound-Conscience.aspx>