

Additional Statement

The following is an improved version of a letter I sent to our National Bishop, Raymond Schultz.

I understand that at the synodical meeting in Winnipeg in July a motion is being put forth that any congregation may, as a local option and on a two-thirds vote, license its pastor to perform same sex blessings. I wish to comment on this motion as a concerned layperson. My pastor, Stephen Scheidt, has encouraged me to do so because he believes that, while you hear from many clergy, you do not receive much comment from the laity.

I first would like to introduce myself. I am a Professor Emeritus at Queen's University where I was a member of the Department of Classics for over thirty years. In the course of my career as a scholar it was my privilege twice, in my capacity as a classicist, to be a member of a seminar at the Society of Biblical Literature in the United States. The first seminar produced a book on the subject of friendship (*philia*) in the Graeco-Roman world and the New Testament and the second gave birth to a book on later Greek Platonism and Gnosticism. I am published in both volumes. I have also taught a course at Queen's on early Christianity and Classical Culture (centered on the Book of Acts) and have taught some patristics in a course on the social and intellectual history of late antiquity. I have some background in patristics from graduate school at the University of Toronto. I think I could claim to be a theologically literate layperson.

I would like first to comment upon the motion itself. Whatever the merits of blessing gay unions, I find it, as it stands, lacking both in courage and in any colour of intellectual integrity. If those who prefer this motion really believe in what they are doing, they should simply introduce a motion allowing the blessing of gay unions. Proponents advance the argument that the measure is simply pastoral, with no doctrinal content. All practice, at least implicitly, involves theory. All pastoral applications imply theology. So the latter argument is clearly vacuous. The overall design is one of gradualism by which certain elements in our church can, step by step, advance their liberal goals. Since I am convinced that doctrinal issues are involved, it is clear to me that this matter cannot be decided as a "local option." What next? Could we at St. Mark's omit some of the Ten Commandments are an article of the Apostles' Creed?

I wish also to address the *real* issue, that of gay unions. I shall discuss this issue under four headings: (1) The effect adoption of this motion upon the mission field; (2) the effect upon ecumenical relations; (3) the effect upon the health of the ELCIC; and (4) the intrinsic merit of the case for the blessing of same sex unions.

- (1) Recently Peter Akinola, Nigerian Anglican Primate, has protested the ordination as Bishop by the Episcopal Church in New Hampshire of a Gene Robinson, who is in an openly gay relationship. He has pointed out that his own church (in stark contrast with the American Episcopalians) is growing by leaps and bounds. Yet his church is threatened by the expansion of Islam which regards homosexual behaviour as a sin. He has also expressed the opinion that those in the Anglican communion who condone homosexual behaviour have founded what is tantamount to another religion. Jackson Nzerebende Tembo, Bishop of South Rwnzori in Ugnada, has limited the financial help he is willing to accept from the American Episcopalians over this same

issue. It is true that ordination and the blessing of same sex unions are different, but the overall effect would be the same. We would deeply imperil our mission outreach.

- (2) We have currently reached an accord with the Roman Catholics on the question of salvation by faith and have made great progress in our ecumenical discussions. The new Pope has made it clear that he regards homosexual behaviour as a sin. The Russian Church has stated that it will not engage in ecumenical discussion with any body that condones homosexual acts. Surely we would impede our ecumenical discussions with other churches if we follow the course suggested.
- (3) If you wish to look, as into a mirror, for the effect of the suggested course of action upon our denomination, you need look no further than the United Church of Canada. Since that body blessed and ordained gays, it has become the church with the fastest decline in membership in the western world. The United Church commissioned a study to discover the reason for this phenomenon. The study found that the liberal leadership of the church was hopelessly out of touch with the conservative roots of their membership. Paradoxically, the leadership concluded that they should be even more liberal in their decisions. I do not think that I am all that atypical a Lutheran: I am a confessional Lutheran and a catholic for whom scripture and tradition, not the prevailing culture, are normative. If my church follows the course of the United Church, I shall conclude that it is not (as required by the Augsburg Confession) an institution where the gospel is preached in its purity. With much prayer and study I shall have to find another home. Since the Anglicans are going in the same sad direction, I fear that I could not be happy in their church.
- (4) There is not space here to get into all of the issues involved in discussing the intrinsic merits of the case. I can only say that I have examined the statements coming out of the ELCIC. There is an attempt to attain a sort of equipoise on the basis of scripture between support for or against the motion. I find the exegesis of scripture advanced toward this end to be both self-serving and philologically unacceptable. Certainly the practice of blessing same sex unions is at variance with the scriptural and patristic tradition that regards heterosexual marriage, which mirrors the relationship between Christ and His church, as central to faith and practice.

Those who advocate the blessing of same sex unions see themselves as “progressive,” “in the vanguard,” and “in the cultural mainstream.” The actual effect of this motion, if adopted, would be to render the ELCIC sectarian and isolated in the world of contemporary Christianity. Rome will never adopt such a motion because they know of the great movement of the Spirit in the third world which rejects such antinomianism. The Roman Catholic Catechism (largely drafted by the present Pope) makes clear, and should make clear, that we should not condemn the person of someone who is gay. One thing that scripture makes clear is that homosexual behaviour is, not only a sin, but a judgment. It occurs in a society that has already sunk into idolatry. I think the true meaning of Paul in Romans 1 is that homosexuality is itself a form of idolatry. Think of it. Proponents say that a homosexual union contains all the elements of marriage: nurture, sex, child rearing. But these are contained in a discrete and non-organic form. It is itself an imitation, and indeed an idol, constructed out of the elements of true marriage. I should also say that those who think that Paul would not know an elevated and romantic version of a homosexual relationship ignore his familiarity with classical literature.

I am not familiar with all the ins and outs of our synodical offices and our seminaries. I simply know and love my parish church. However, I perceive among our leadership a dangerous drift toward postmodern antinomianism. Think how precious and unlikely a survival our Lutheran faith is in Canada! What a terrible waste it would be to imperil our tradition. I shall pray that God, who never changes, will guide you and your colleagues.

Yours in Christ,

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