

Scriptural Authority To Suffer Another ELCA Blow in 2019?

By Pastor Steven K. Gjerde, CORE Vice President

If you're following trends in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), you may have heard already about the [draft Social Statement on Women and Justice](#) slated for discussion and adoption in 2019. It has started earning some just criticisms —

One critique will sound familiar: the continuing loss of Scriptural authority.

I recently heard one pastor, a Palestinian and self-proclaimed feminist, complain that the document confuses justification and the Christian life — and Lutheran CORE will be adding its own critique over the next year. One critique will sound familiar: the continuing loss of Scriptural authority.

Repeat After Me

In 2009, the ELCA attempted to deal with disagreements over sexuality by acknowledging differences of Biblical interpretation among its members and insisting that the ELCA had room for everyone. This compromise created the untenable situation of a church saying two opposite things about the same subject. In contrast, the draft statement on women and justice, concerned with resisting sexism and patriarchy, seeks no such interpretive compromise and seems to want everyone to say the same thing. To achieve this end, it takes a broad swipe at the Bible.

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Scripture Requires the ELCA's Critique?

While citing the "misuse" of Scripture as its main target, it plainly presents Scripture itself as a problematic text that requires the church's critique:

We confess that there are problems within the Scriptures themselves and that our theological tradition has led to a theological understanding of humankind that is overly male-identified. These problems even become idolatrous as deeply rooted but false beliefs. (lines 876-879)

Scripture Threatens Your Spiritual Health?

The more I read these sentences, the more fascinating I find them to be. Although the authors squish some talk of "theological tradition" in the middle, the first and last part of this passage focuses on the "problems" found in Scripture and makes a simple assertion about them: if believed, they lead to idola-

try. The qualifiers placed on beliefs ("deeply rooted" and "false") do not mitigate that assertion at all. Of course the beliefs involved in idolatry are false, and even "lightly rooted" beliefs (whatever they may be) could lead, I suppose, to lightly-held idolatry. The point is clear: Scripture contains texts that (in and of themselves) endanger your spiritual health and tarnish the glory of God.

Sinful marks of Patriarchy?

Within the context of the whole draft statement, these "problems" are clear: Scripture contains words, phrases, symbols, patterns, etc. that bear the sinful marks of patriarchy and sexism — indeed, certain words of Scripture are quite simply sin, denying the article of justification by faith. This latter assertion becomes clearer in another telling but almost off-hand comment about First Timothy 2:15.

This verse by St. Paul reads, "But women will be saved through childbearing if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety." Certainly, those words have garnered all kinds of attention, and most commentary that I have read does what the statement repeatedly suggests: it takes into account historical context, especially then-current understandings of a woman's primary vocation in society, and states that Paul is promising that women will be saved and healed in the course of that vocation by Christian faith and its life.

But now enters the ELCA's draft social statement (lines 1344-1355):

"Indeed, gender-based rules are even presented in one letter as a form of works righteousness (1 Timothy 2:15)." With no further explanation or acknowledgement of alternative interpretations, this verse of Scripture falls to the cutting floor, condemned as contrary to the [article of justification by faith](#). Earlier in the same paragraph, the au-

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Scriptural Authority ... Blow?

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thors also cast a subtle sneer on the household codes of Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3, censoring the belief that descriptions of marriage based on Christ and the Church are “God-assigned.” So there you have it: the draft statement sets out to determine which passages of Scripture are sinful and ungodly, and which are true and God-breathed.

Now showing is a new and aggressive willingness to identify error and silence it, starting with the Bible itself.

Flawed Approach

As a female colleague once noted, this approach means that Scripture’s clearest prohibition of marital rape and abuse (Ephesians 5:25-30) now loses its divine authority. It was only those pagans who insisted on treating their wives as their own flesh, tenderly nourishing and caring for them, and Christians adopted all that claptrap because talk of tenderness and love appealed to their sexist, patriarchal minds. Beware! And let the church help you navigate your way around such chatter.

Take Note of the ELCA’s Shift

More broadly speaking, the draft’s approach to Biblical interpretation signals a shift from how the ELCA operated in 2009, and traditional believers in the ELCA should note it. Fading is that postmodern tolerance, officially adopted with regard to sexuality, to which confessing Lutherans might still appeal for some consideration. Now showing is a new and aggressive willingness to identify error and silence it, starting with the Bible itself. Contrary interpretations are not so much engaged or considered (much less handled charitably) as they are woven into strawmen and set aflame. That approach, far more than the subject itself, should be marked.



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Sin! Your Name is Patriarchy!

Back in 2009, the social statement of the day understood itself to be making room for differences of interpretation. Now this social statement goes so far as to exclude certain Biblical texts from the faith. Add to this mix an ambiguous relationship to the Incarnation (how much distance can one sentence put between God and that boy from Nazareth?) and the strange decision to use an abstract concept

(“patriarchy”) as the name for a sin (note to the ELCA's ecumenical partner, Patriarch Bartholomew:

"Surprise!"), and you have far more than a draft social statement. You have a brave, new church that might just leave you in the dust, right next to Ephesians 5.

You have a brave new church that might just leave you and Ephesians 5 in the dust.

COME TO CHICAGO FOR ENCUESTRO 2018

by Pr. Keith Forni, Lutheran CORE Board Member

Encuentro (Encounter) 2018 will again be hosted by Saint Timothy Lutheran Church- ELCA, 2101 North Kildare Avenue in Chicago's Hermosa neighborhood, gathered around the theme “Fight the Good Fight of Faith / Pelea la Buena Batalla de la Fe,” 1 Timothy 6:12.

The Inter-Lutheran Hispanic-Latino / Bilingual Ministry resourcing event, sponsored annually by Lutheran CORE, will take place Friday, October 12, 2018.

Featured presentations will focus on Neighborhood Ministry, Advent-Christmas Celebrations including Las Posadas, Liturgical Spanish 101. The "Misa Panamericana" will be celebrated with Mariachi musicians.



Keynote speakers will be announced soon. *There is no cost to attend.* Meals will be provided by St. Timothy, Chicago and First & Santa Cruz, Joliet.