

FORUM LETTER

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True scale of values

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*“Chastity! If one does not reduce this term, as is so often and erroneously done, only to its sexual connotations, it is understood as the positive counterpart of sloth. The exact and full translation of the Greek *sofrosini* . . . ought to be *whole-mindedness*. Sloth is, first of all, dissipation, the brokenness of our vision and energy, the inability to see the whole. Its opposite then is precisely *wholeness*. If we usually mean by chastity the virtue opposed to sexual depravity, it is because the broken character of our existence is nowhere better manifested than in sexual lust — the alienation of the body from the life and control of the spirit. Christ restores wholeness in us and He does so by restoring in us the true scale of values by leading us back to God. — from Great Lent: Journey to Pascha by Alexander Schmemmann (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003)*

An ambiguously tentative “probably not”

by Kenneth Kimball



The church council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) adopted *Response of the Church Council to the Request of the Metropolitan New York Synod* (MNYS) April 2. If you don’t remember, the New York synod last October effectively declared independence from ELCA disciplinary standards regarding openly gay pastors in openly gay relationships. At the same time, they thoughtfully went ahead and requested “clarification” on their resolution from the church council, seeking to know whether the “guidance” they had offered to the bishop and synod officials at their special assembly was “in concurrence with the governing documents of the ELCA.” *Forum Letter* covered that special assembly in the December 2005 issue, “Defying Orlando: The ABCs of the New York Synod” (*FL*:12:34).

Tentative ambiguity

The answer in the church council’s *Response* is a tentative “probably not” — “probably not” meaning the MNYS resolution “may be read” as being in conflict with the ELCA’s constitution, disciplinary standards, by-laws, and all that.

The ambiguity of “may be read” was regarded as problematic by some members of the council. “May be read,” it was pointed out, also allows the possibility of “may not be read.” Efforts to include stronger language, however, were repeatedly defeated.

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The result is a *Response* that is strictly a constitutional opinion, albeit one largely written by what passes for the ELCA's supreme court, the Office of the Secretary, and thereafter adopted by the church council.

Might or should or must

The *Response* is notable more for what it does not do than for what it does. It does not, first, legitimate the MNYS's attempt to overturn the outcome of the 2005 ELCA churchwide assembly on the issue of easing disciplinary rules for gay pastors. Second, it does not censure the MNYS, nor, third, does it require the MNYS to revoke any of the actions taken at its special assembly (not even the MNYS resolution's favorable citation of a non-existent bylaw).

The council's *Response* does appear to draw a line in the sand — reaffirming the constitutional boundaries of the ELCA. But it leaves unsaid what sort of action, if any, the church council or presiding bishop might or should or must take if MNYS (or any other synod, for that matter) continues to cross that line.

Early in the council's discussion, a handful of (let's call them) "idealist revisionists" made an attempt to approve the MNYS action, effectively overturning the outcome of the 2005 churchwide assembly. They introduced a substitute *Response* that would have placed the church council on record as "not" reading the MNYS resolution in conflict with the ELCA's governing documents. The rest of the church council generally understood this as an attempt to circumvent the churchwide assembly. For the church council to take such an action would be constitutionally questionable and damaging and not likely to set well, so it was said aloud, "with the folks in the pews."

Practical revisionists

Arrayed against the substitute were (short-hand, again) a "practical revisionist" majority, led by ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson.

While personally sympathetic to the cause represented by the MNYS actions, the "practical revisionists" parted ways with the "idealists" only over methods and means. They accepted the necessity of working within a constitutional system

requiring a longer time frame.

"I read the New York resolution as trying to do what Resolution #3 offered and was rejected by the churchwide assembly," Bp. Hanson said. "To adopt this substitute that allows the MNYS resolution to stand is to adopt Recommendation #3. I am concerned how that will be received in this church."

When a council member suggested saying nothing and simply take no position in regard to MNYS's resolution, Bp. Hanson also thought this unwise. "Silence," he told the council, "may not be helpful. Other actions may come from other synods, on both sides of this issue. This church needs a clear word of interpretation from its elected leaders. For the church council to be silent on this would be to take a position."

In the end, while quite a number of council members made clear their sympathies were with MNYS, they nonetheless said that the constitutional process and order must be respected. The church council cannot override or change the outcome of a churchwide assembly.

A prevailing council majority, consisting of a handful of traditionalists together with a much larger number of "practical revisionists," coalesced around the question: "How to honor the actions of the churchwide assembly while continuing dialogue (and preserving unity) within the church?"

So, the substitute *Response* was roundly and soundly defeated on a voice vote, with only two or three voices in its favor and with a loud and definite majority of the council saying "No."

Technically telling

At the same time, while reluctant to supersede the actions of the churchwide assembly, the church council was clearly disinclined to endorse the actions of the assembly, particularly in regard to the defeat of Resolution #3.

This was illustrated by the council's decision to note the 2005 churchwide assembly decisions by a single parenthetical reference.

This is technical but telling. The sole reference to the churchwide assembly action was moved from near the beginning, where it was originally, all the way to the end. The 2005 churchwide assembly decisions on the three

sexuality resolutions from Orlando were detached from “applicable policies related to rostered ministry and candidacy” and attached to something about “continuing dialogue on mission and ministry issues within the life of this church” near the conclusion of *Response*.

The point to make is, the decisions of the 2005 Orlando assembly are by no means regarded by the ELCA church council as the last word on the subject. The revisionist majority on the council — whether “practical” or “idealist” — regard the disciplinary policies of the ELCA as having only

impermanant status, requiring only an uncertain lip service.

It is a subtle distinction to be sure, but one that says a great deal about where we are in the ELCA.

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Emending scripture to suit our fashions

by Erma Seaton Wolf



“Emend: to improve by critical editing. From the Latin: *ex, away + mendere, fault.*” That is the definition from the *American Heritage Dictionary* for the word used by the Renewing Worship team to describe the process by which the scriptural texts are being edited for *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*.

The need to rework scriptural texts for liturgical use is nothing new. Nor do such texts, when used in worship and prayer, always need to be exact translations from the original Hebrew or Greek. The best example of that is the traditional version of the Lord’s Prayer as used by English-speaking Lutherans, which uses words and phrases that do not exist in either the Matthean or Lukan versions of the prayer as Jesus taught it.

Removing the masculine

However, the emending of the psalms, as proposed for *ELW*, goes into new territory beyond mere artistic license for liturgical use. The Renewing Worship website calls it “limit(ing) the use of gender-specific pronouns.” What that amounts to is removal of all masculine pronouns for God, removal of most other pronouns (masculine or feminine), and removal of most gender-specific references found in all scripture texts used in *ELW*, including (but not limited to) the entire book of psalms.

A look at some specific, representative examples will quickly give the reader an idea of

the scope of this revision. Take Psalm 23, which reads this way in the *LBW*:

He makes me lie down in green pastures and leads me beside still waters. He revives my soul and guides me along right pathways for his name's sake.

As emended for *ELW*, this passage will read:

The Lord makes me lie down in green pastures and leads me beside still waters. You restore my soul, O Lord, and guide me along right pathways for your name’s sake.”

This example demonstrates two principles that guided the Renewing Worship team in their editing of the Psalms: elimination of masculine pronouns and shifting direct address to God from third person to second person.

Avoiding gender

The Renewing Worship website describes these principles in the document, *The Use of Scripture in the Language of Prayer and Worship: Liturgical Use of the Psalms*. Best to quote directly from it:

The proposal seeks further to honor the use of the psalms in worship by including the entire Psalter. However, the proposal seeks to respond to the desire, expressed by many over the past generation, to pray the psalms in the language of prayer, that is addressed to God, *and in language that avoids the preponderance of masculine language and images within the current liturgical version.* Based on the current version in *LBW*, the proposed version represents a conservative revision, which retains the names and images for God in the psalms (including “The LORD”) but which more often (as is common in Hebrew poetry) shifts from “third person” descriptive language to direct forms of addressing God, *and which limits the use of gender-specific pronouns.* (Emphasis added.)

While this passage gives the appearance that the shift in address from second to third person is primary and, by and large, separate from the removal of gender-specific pronouns, in fact in almost every instance in which such a shift in address occurs, it is in order to make the elimination of pronouns possible without repeating the word “God” over and over.

Psalm 91 is a good example of this emending process as regards language for both God and human beings. In the *LBW*, verses 1-4 read this way:

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, abides under the shadow of the Almighty. He shall say to the Lord, “You are my refuge and my stronghold, my God in whom I put my trust.” He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler. . . . He will cover you with his pinions, and you will find refuge under his wings; his faithfulness shall be a shield and buckler.

Now, in *ELW*, this is the emended text:

You who dwell in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty — you will say to the Lord, “My refuge and my stronghold, my God in whom I put my trust.” For God will rescue you from the snare of the fowler. . . . God’s wings will cover you, and you will find refuge beneath them; God’s faithfulness will be your shield and defense.

The *ELW* version of Psalm 91 reads very much like the hymn, *On Eagle’s Wings*, based on this psalm. The hymn changes the text of the psalm to one of direct address in order to “inclusivise” the text. Fair enough. But then to take a hymnic version of the psalm and use it in the psalter, replacing the original language, is unprecedented.

Including women

Lest women think this is a process that only affects masculine language, Psalm 128 shows the results of the “even-handed” effort in limiting gender-specific language. The *LBW* text reads:

Happy are they all who fear the Lord, and follow in his ways! You shall eat the fruit of your labor; happiness and prosperity shall be yours. Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine within your house, your children like olive shoots round about your table. The man who fears the Lord shall thus indeed be blessed. (vv. 1-4)

And here is the proposed *ELW* version:

Happy are they all who fear the Lord, and who follow in God’s ways! You shall eat the fruit of your labor; happiness and prosperity shall be yours. Your spouse shall be like a fruitful vine within your house, your children like olive shoots round about your table. The

one who fears the Lord shall thus indeed be blessed.

Such a substitution might elicit a chuckle or two, trying to figure out how a husband becomes a fruitful vine. (And there is some humor, I'm sure unintentional, in some of the emended psalms. In Psalm 109, all of the "he" pronouns are replaced with "they." The result is the speaker now curses an entire group of people instead of one lone opponent.)

In comparing the final version of the texts with what was proposed earlier, it is clear that great effort has been expended to make this version of the psalms skillful and aesthetically pleasing. Some real clunkers from earlier drafts have been removed, replaced with theologically astute and poetic language. The worst fears of many — namely, the wholesale removal of the name "the LORD" and total elimination of any masculine noun as a descriptor for God — have not come to pass.

Disconnecting Christ from the psalms

But this version of the psalms is *not* "a conservative revision." This emendation does not "limit" the use of gender-specific nouns. It eliminates all masculine pronouns for God, and does it even when it will break the liturgical, Christian connection between the psalms and the life of Jesus Christ. (Examples of this are in Psalm 118:26, Psalm 80:16; Psalm 22:8; and Psalm 8:5-8.)

And that points to one of the real dangers in this edited version of the psalms: the removal of the traditional reading of the Old Testament psalms through the lens of the New Testament, by breaking the linguistic strands that link the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth to the prophetic foreshadowing present in the texts of the psalms.

But there is another, greater threat looming. This emendation is not limited to the psalms. In the brief readings from Night Prayer (called *Compline* in the *LBW*), this text from 1 Peter 5:6-9 has been edited from:

Humble yourself under God's mighty hand and he will lift you up in due time. Cast all your cares on him, for you are his charge. Be

sober, be watchful.

to:

Humble yourselves under God's mighty hand, so that God may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on the one who cares for you. Discipline yourselves, keep alert.

Keep alert, indeed. This "emendation" is consistent with all other language changes made to scripture in the proposed *ELW* text. The danger is clear. It is now considered permissible within the ELCA to rewrite the scriptures to remove "objectionable" language from worship.

Today the issue is gender-specific words and phrasing. What will it be tomorrow? Will it be permissible to rewrite scriptures used in worship in the pursuit of the goals of somebody's idea of ideological accuracy? Will Augsburg Fortress offer a series of lectionary inserts in which *all* scripture has been "emended" to eliminate offensive language for God, gender-specific or some other thing deemed offensive? Lest one think this is too far-fetched, this has already been done through extensive emendation of gender-specific language in The New Revised Standard Version.

Embarrassing fashions

These words do not belong to us, to rewrite and edit every time we find a picture of God that embarrasses present fashions or cultural sentiments. No task force, no Lutheran Old Testament scholar, no bishop has been given authority to "emend" the scriptures used in worship, not in this way.

These words, instead, are the treasure of the whole Church, entrusted to it by God. Whether they are used in public worship, in study, or in private devotion, these are the words of Holy Scripture, one of the primary ways in which Christians encounter the Word of God in the Incarnate Lord, Jesus Christ. How can we claim the scriptures as "the authoritative source and norm" for us in matters of faith and life (as is done in the ELCA Constitution) if we can "emend" them to reflect what our culture and our personal desires now deem unacceptable?

Responses from the worship leadership under the Office of the Bishop have not been encouraging. The timetable for the presentation of the new *ELW* and its accompanying resources would, it appears, be nearly impossible to halt at this point. Despite assurances as to the careful nature of the review process and future clarity regarding which texts are actual translations of scripture, a precedent is being set. An entire book

of the Bible — all the psalms — has been “emended” in its presentation to the worshipping community in the ELCA. There are no guarantees such rewriting of scripture will stop here.

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A bishop of problematic intent



We reported in April that ELCA Metropolitan Chicago Synod Bp. Paul Landahl was the preacher last March at St. Francis Lutheran Church, San Francisco, when Pr. Robert Goldstein, an openly gay man, was installed as senior pastor (“The Bishops of Problematic Situations,” *FL*:35:4).

Landahl’s participation, we suggested, was to express sympathy for the stated fight to “change ELCA policies toward sexual minority pastors.” And we added, “This is not to suggest that, as a bishop in the ELCA, he is not also equally charged with upholding those policies St. Francis seeks to change.”

Landahl seems to have done something of that with a vengeance.

Three times so far in 2006 — in January, February, and March — Landahl has sent letters to the pastors of the synod announcing clergy resignations due to sexual misconduct. Two pastors resigned over sexual affairs with women in their congregations. The third case, however, involved a unmarried male pastor involved in a brief affair a year and a half ago, or better, with a married adult male.

Colleagues of this third pastor describe him to us as a conservative orthodox pastor with excellent liturgical skills who had served his congregation and the synod with some distinction over the years. The affair did not involve anyone in or related to his congregation (though this does not, we point out, diminish its seriousness). The informant who filed the complaint with Landahl was the ex-wife of the pastor’s male ex-lover. She filed her complaint some six months after her divorce was final.

The pastor in question was a half-year shy of 30 years in ELCA’s health plan. We are told a 30-year anniversary would have permitted continued health coverage, including coverage for a diabetic condition.

The affair was brief. It was a year and a half or more in the past. It may or may not have contributed to the divorce of the man and his wife (that the former wife waited so long after divorce before bringing misconduct charges perhaps suggests motives at work other than mere discipline of an errant pastor). The pastor, we are reliably informed, repented of his action, made a confession and received absolution. For his transgression, the pastor was delivered the maximum penalty by being removed from the clergy roster.

There is a difference — in degree if not in kind — between an egregious offense that scandalizes a congregation and an act, while not being in the least condonable, that doesn’t. We think something of the elements involved in the latter should have been taken into account here.

Graceless error

Landahl is frequently accused of antinominism and has just as frequently defended his support of the gay agenda to his synod by saying he prefers to err on the side of grace. Part of this grace-filled error includes preaching at St. Francis at the installation of a pastor who has made no secret of his gay lifestyle. Indeed, far from a secret, he displays it as the center piece of his pastoral ministry.

We can think, off-hand, of about sixteen other ways to have disciplined the pastor short of demanding immediate resignation from the roster.

A thirty-day penitential fast on bread and water at St. Augustine's House comes most immediately to mind. Suspension from office while postponing removal from the roster until the issues around health benefits were resolved might have been

another.

But Landahl did enforce *Vision & Expectations*. We are moved to express the sentiment, perhaps a less antinomian bishop could have found a less legalistic solution. — *by the editor*

Luther Seminary and James Nestingen



This isn't anything I want to mess with, frankly. Dr. James A. Nestingen and Luther Seminary agreed some while back to a mutual parting of the ways. He has retired from his professorship, though he will continue to be on hand for some teaching assignments.

Beyond noting that the principal involved is a man I consider a friend, and friendships merit a due regard for circumspection, there is also the fact this was a personnel issue between Luther Seminary and one of its tenured professors. The issue deserves no more notice than what Dr. Nestingen and Luther Seminary mutually agreed to release publicly at the seminary website. That should take care of that and nothing more need be said. Except. Well, except for the respect Dr. Nestingen deservedly holds among traditionalist ELCA Lutherans as a staunch defender of the Lutheran Confessions. It is his confessionalism that has led to nervous speculation by some — if not outright accusation by others — that Luther Seminary is out to purge itself of confessional anti-revisionist theologians.

So far as I can figure out, that simply is not

the case.

So, this being a personnel issue and not a theological or confessional issue, there is little to add. But as to the speculation, I can say that it makes no sense for Luther Seminary, given its support base, to rid itself of someone who is one if not the premiere representative of the Hermann Preus-Gerhard Forde tradition of Lutheranism, especially when that person has been, over the years, Luther's most prominent faculty member, and one who made a very respectable showing in balloting for presiding bishop of the ELCA.

Nor does it make any sense that what is being attacked here, as suggested to us more than once, is the Word Alone Network. The leadership of that organization is dominated by Luther graduates and Luther faculty. It makes even less sense for the new Luther Seminary president (with a Missouri Synod background no less) to pick a fight like this.

What does make sense is exactly what happened. A personnel issue was resolved to the public satisfaction of those most directly involved. — *by the editor*

Omnium gatherum

Needing an LCMS dispensation ● To our surprise, we discover that Dr. James Lamb, executive director of Lutherans for Life, is not permitted to take the pulpit in any congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. He can attend an ELCA potluck, serve the jell-o salad and deliver an after-dinner speech, but he may not preach from the pulpit. Ever. The fault, we hasten to say, lies with the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod and not with the ELCA. Lamb is an LCMS

pastor and LCMS pastors simply may not occupy an ELCA pulpit — not unless they are eager to have an LCMS “conservative” file charges against them for “unionism,” “syncretism,” or something else out of the array of doctrinal crimes LCMS pastors frequently allege against one another. This calls for a creative solution.

One solution would be for LCMS President Gerald Kieschnick to issue a blanket dispensation to Dr. Lamb, allowing him to preach any where he

chooses when invited. Of course, the last time Dr. Kieschnick gave one of his pastors permission for something of that sort, it got him and the pastor in a whole lot of trouble. So, another solution, more informal, is this: to simply ask the LCMS “conservative” independent press to give Dr. Lamb a pass. Oh, and, equally, to ask the LCMS “moderate” independent press to refrain from crowing about it. See, problem solved.

Too “other” for the others ● You saw our piece last issue, “Independent ‘Other’ Organizations,” about, well, the kinds of other organizations that receive official recognition from the ELCA. Consider Lutherans for Life, which makes an effort at pan-Lutheranism. Financial supporters include a number of ELCA members. There are no restrictions in the by-laws to prevent an ELCA member from serving on the board of directors. With all this in mind, LFF once upon a time asked to apply for that ELCA “other organization” status. LFF instead received a terse letter flatly saying they would never qualify, hence there was no point in applying. So there. LFF is an LCMS “recognized service organization,” so maybe the ELCA’s trouble is with the LCMS connection and not the pro-life thing. One may hope. I think. (For more on LFF, visit <www.lutheransforlife.org>.)

Revising Concordia ● Concordia Publishing House (CPH) will revise *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions, A Reader’s Edition*. We covered this last August (“CPH, Benke, and Worship of the True God,” *FL*:34:8). CPH has been pummeled by LCMS “moderates” over a paraphrase contained in

Concordia that seemed to lend “conservative” ammunition against “moderates.” After review by the Commission on Doctrinal Review (what else would you call it?), CPH was told to make a number of changes. The Commission was clear to say, no false doctrine was involved but *Concordia* requires “serious revision.” I don’t know which is more remarkable in this story: the theological fight or that the LCMS bothers to conduct doctrinal review of published materials. The latter will surprise many ELCA readers. The notion of any formal doctrinal review of anything from the ELCA publishing house sounds just weird, given the state of some ELCA publications.

Full exclusion ● In the April issue of *The Voice*, newsletter of San Francisco Conference, ELCA Sierra Pacific Synod, there is an article on the installation of Robert Goldstein as an openly gay pastor of St. Francis Lutheran Church. Bp. Paul Landahl, Chicago, was preacher, and of that, noted *The Voice*:

Bishop Landahl’s presence and sermon reminded everyone that the struggle continues in the ELCA for full exclusion of sexual minority persons.

Full exclusion? Wow! We’ve been accused of being homophobic, but never have we advocated “full exclusion.” For Landahl to take that position — and in San Francisco — was certainly unexpectedly courageous. (Yeah, yeah, a typo. But it gave us about 3½ inches of copy, didn’t it?)

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