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I want that cow . . .



“Of the seven deadly sins, only envy is no fun at all. Sloth may not seem much fun, nor anger either, but giving way to deep laziness has its pleasures and the expression of anger entails a release that is not without its small delights. In recompense, envy may be the subtlest—perhaps I should say the most insidious—of the seven deadly sins. Surely it is the one that people are least likely to want to own up to, for to do so is to admit that one is probably ungenerous, mean, small-hearted. It may also be the most endemic. . . . Degrees of envy exist, of course, some mild, some strong, some cool, others hot. Where envy turns ugly is when it turns pure: when, that is, one doesn’t even require any advantage for oneself but is perfectly content to make sure that the next person derives no advantage. A joke that nicely illustrates the point tells of an Englishwoman, a Frenchman, and a Russian, who are each given a single wish by one of those genies whose almost relentless habit it is to pop out of bottles. The Englishwoman says that a friend of hers has a charming cottage in the Cotswolds, and that she would like a similar cottage, with the addition of two extra bedrooms and a second bath and a brook running in front of it. The Frenchman says that his best friend has a beautiful blonde mistress, and he would like such a mistress himself, but a redhead instead of a blonde and with longer legs and a bit more in the way of culture and *chic*. The Russian, when asked what he would like, tells of a neighbor who has a cow that gives a vast quantity of the richest milk, which yields the heaviest cream and the purest butter. ‘I vant dat cow,’ the Russian tells the genie, ‘dead.’” —Joseph Epstein, *Envy: The Seven Deadly Sins* (Oxford University Press, 2006)

The meaning of words



It was Humpty Dumpty, in Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass*, who offered that always-useful dictum: “When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.” Alice responded, “The question is, whether you can make words mean so many different things.”

That is also the question that keeps popping up about the ELCA’s sexuality decisions last August. There was a lot of high-falutin’ talk about “bound conscience,” and about “journeying together faithfully,” but when you come right down to it, words can mean so many different things.

Take the recent statement of some faculty members past and present of Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary. Rather pretentiously dubbed the “Columbia Declaration,” this document tells us that the undersigned folks

“support the actions of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly.” Not just any old actions, of course, but the ones related to homosexuality. Specifically, they support “the opening of the roster of the ELCA to qualified and approved candidates who are . . .” blah blah blah, you know the rest. Then this: “We also support the actions of the assembly that create the possibility for individual congregations who so choose to bless same-sex unions.”

Leave aside the grammatically inelegant phrasing there. The point that should be noted is that the assembly really didn’t do any such thing.

What does this mean?

What the assembly actually approved is a resolution “that the ELCA commit itself to finding ways to allow congregations that choose to do so to recognize, support and hold publicly accountable lifelong, monogamous, same gender relationships.” It says nothing whatsoever about “blessing same-sex unions.”

Of course in the Humpty Dumpty world of the ELCA, some are saying that this is what the resolution actually meant. The Columbia declarants apparently think so. One can understand their misinterpreting the Churchwide Assembly actions, since those were pretty confusing. But the “Frequently Asked Questions” feature on the ELCA’s official web site shouldn’t be that hard to get, even for theologians: “Does this mean the ELCA has endorsed the blessing of same-gender unions? No, the assembly was not asked to consider and thus took no action concerning a churchwide rite of blessing. The assembly’s action means that a congregation, however, is permitted to find ways to hold publicly accountable same-gender relationships that intend to be lifelong and monogamous and to surround these couples and their families with prayer and support in a variety of ways.”

Rite or contract?

But, some are quick to say, how else would a congregation “hold publicly accountable” a same-sex couple if not through “blessing same-sex unions”? Actually the social statement itself has a bit to say about what “publicly accountable means,” and it doesn’t say much about “blessing.” Lutherans, it says, “long have affirmed that the public accountability of marriage, *as expressed through a legal con-*

tract, provides the necessary social support and trust for relationships that are intended to be sustained throughout life.”

Lutherans have long recognized a kind of tension between marriage as a contract, regulated by the state, and marriage as a divine institution. You know, two kingdoms and all that. From the point of view of the sexuality statement, the “public accountability” piece comes primarily through the contractual arrangement offered by the state. While only a couple of states currently allow for same-sex marriage, a number of others offer civil unions, and of course most anywhere two people can enter into a contract with one another, agreeing to own property jointly, or to be responsible for one another in various ways.

When it comes to a “rite of blessing,” however, the ELCA has pretty much said “no.” Or, more precisely, the ELCA has said that “pastoral care” of same-sex couples can be done, and should be done, in all sorts of ways other than a rite of blessing. Indeed, the Conference of Bishops back in 1993 (in one of the few attempts the bishops have made to be teachers of the faith) specifically said there is no basis in Scripture or tradition for an official ceremony blessing same-sex unions, while at the same time allowing that congregations should “explore the best ways to provide pastoral care to all to whom they minister.” That statement was affirmed by the 2005 Churchwide Assembly.

Has anything really changed?

So has anything changed with regard to same-sex blessings as a result of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly? Not really. If a congregation wants to offer to bless same-sex relationships under the guise of “pastoral care,” no bishop (at least among our current crop) is likely to try to stop them. But neither has the ELCA endorsed the blessing of same-sex relationships, proposed or even called for a rite of blessing, or, for that matter, even encouraged this as a possibility. Contrary to what the Columbia declarants claim, there was no “new possibility created” by the assembly (beyond, of course, the new possibility of persons in PALMS being ordained).

Yet people will say that the words mean whatever they choose to make them mean. One senses that ELCA officials, with a wink and a nod, are happy to let people interpret the actions of the

assembly in this way. Officially no one will suggest that the ELCA “supports” same-sex blessings – mostly for PR reasons, since such blessings seem to be a more difficult pill to swallow for many laity. But let a bunch of seminary professors *suggest* that this is what the assembly did, and pretty soon people will start thinking that’s what the words actually mean. It’s sort of a churchly version of the big lie.

Being clear

Those who oppose the actions of the Church-wide Assembly are now in the strange position of being the ones who must keep reminding the church what those actions actually were. They could be summarized under three headings:

First, the Assembly officially admitted that the ELCA has no teaching on the question of homosexuality (and precious little on any aspect of sexuality, as far as that goes). What we have is an array of opinions held “with conviction and integrity.” The ELCA is committed to “mutual respect . . . as we live with disagreement.”

Second, the Assembly officially changed the “opinion” governing ordained ministry by reversing the standards which precluded persons in same-sex relationships from such ministry.

Third, the Assembly declined to call for the establishment of a rite for blessing same-sex relationships. It noted, but did not endorse, the opinion of some that “marriage” is an appropriate word to describe such relationships. It called for pastoral care of persons in same-sex relationships, but in doing so quite carefully said nothing about “blessing” or “ceremony” or “rite.”

Stopping the tide

Of course trying to keep that clear is like trying to stop the tide from coming in. It is probably only a matter of time before a rite of “same-sex blessing” is officially approved. Or, more likely, as more and more states approve same-sex marriage, congregations and pastors will simply fall into line and perform such marriages using the already available rites.

In the meantime, though, Humpty Dumpty reigns. And if Alice dares wonder whether words can be made to mean so many different things, the answer is the same as Humpty Dumpty’s in *Through the Looking Glass*: “The question is which is to be master – that’s all.”

—by Richard O. Johnson, editor

The Creator’s Tapestry: poorly woven

by Marie Meyer



Among the documents included in the workbook for the General Convention of the Lutheran Church—Missouri

Synod this summer is *The Creator’s Tapestry: Scriptural Perspectives on Man-Woman Relationships in Marriage and the Church*. This is the latest and most comprehensive report by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) on God’s design for the male/female relationship. Also on the agenda is the report of the President’s Blue Ribbon Task Force on Synodical Structure and Governance, which urges that convention delegates “see to it that the Church is not deprived of the power of making judgments and decisions according to the Word of God.” *The Creator’s Tapestry* raises a question: does that power belong to LCMS women as well as to LCMS men?

Prior to granting women suffrage in 1969, LCMS theologians defined the relationship of man and woman as the order of creation. Since men were the “natural administrative sex to which the Scripture assigns the ruling function in the church,” women were “not to undertake such things as give evidence of their exercising authority over men in their right, as persons created to be subject to men” (*Woman Suffrage in the Church*, CTCR 1969). Suffrage was eventually granted on the basis that voting is an act of service, not an exercise of authority.

Intense conflict

Theologians who prepared the suffrage report and subsequent studies on the role and conduct of women in the church warned against any service

by women that violated the order of creation. They agreed that the creation of Adam before Eve testifies to man's natural precedence in the order of creation. CTCR reports stated that since man is the head of woman and the head is the power that begins and determines, it follows that headship involves God-ordained male spiritual authority and leadership. Conflict emerged when some LCMS theologians, while affirming the order of creation and the headship structure, concluded that women might nonetheless serve in congregational offices. Others insisted that any modification of the service of women violated the order of creation.

The intense nature of the conflict among LCMS theologians became public in 1994 when the CTCR released a report allowing women to serve in congregational offices that exist by *iuro humano* (human right). Five members of the CTCR wrote a dissenting opinion stating that the report neglected to consider important Scriptural and doctrinal concerns, particularly the order of creation. Convinced that the CTCR acted in haste regarding the sensitive issue of woman's role and conduct in the church, the dissenters cited procedural, historical and theological problems with the majority opinion. Al Barry, at that time Synod President, supported the dissenting opinion.

Conscientious disagreement

When division within the CTCR became public, congregations and other entities submitted 40 overtures to the 1995 convention on issues related to the service of women, ranging from rescinding woman suffrage to allowing the ordination of women. In this emotionally charged atmosphere the convention adopted three resolutions. The first acknowledged that Christians can conscientiously disagree about the suffrage issue. The second declined to adopt the CTCR majority opinion on women in congregational offices, calling for study of both opinions, with response to be made to CTCR, and asking that in the interim women not serve in any office a congregation might wish to restrict to men.

The third resolution, 3-10, addressed confusion in the Synod and our culture regarding the relationship of man and woman, and sought direction from CTCR. Embedded in the resolution were eleven questions which assumed the subordination of the Son to the Father and suggested that this in-

tratrinitarian relationship is applicable to the relationship of man and woman; this, in the minds of some, predetermined the direction and outcome of the discussion, but a motion to delete the questions was defeated.

No working draft

CTCR in fact began work on Resolution 3-10 by prioritizing issues suggested by the questions. A preliminary draft of a Scriptural study was discussed for six years before the Commission finally declined to adopt it. The theologian selected to prepare another study resigned after two years. Thus nine years after receiving the assignment, the Commission still did not have a working draft on the male/female relationship. However, they resubmitted the 1994 study on women in congregational offices to the 2004 convention, which adopted it, 576 to 520. When two hundred delegates requested that their negative votes be recorded, it became apparent that adopting a change in practice before completing the Scriptural study on the male/female relationship had intensified rather than resolved conflict over this issue.

Synod President Gerald Kieschnick immediately appointed five men to a task force charged with preparing guidelines for how congregations might implement the controversial changes. The task force recommended that, to avoid confusion about the pastoral office and to avoid giving offense to the church, distribution of the Lord's Supper ought to be limited to lay men. Women serving as elders remained ambiguous.

Can we talk?

Word that the Synod had once again invested men with the power to decide and judge what Scripture teaches regarding women in the church prompted seven women, of whom I was one, to request a meeting with the Synod's president and vice-presidents. Our concern was that the 10-year focus on questions of practice rather than a study of Scripture on the man/woman relationship reflected a flawed process. We agreed with a report from the President's Commission on Women which in 1987 stated "inconsistencies and uncertainties of what women can do are resulting in a church that is on a collision course with itself."

We were informed we could, at our own ex-

pense, meet with the president, vice-presidents and the executive director of the CTCR. We went to St. Louis with three specific requests: 1) that women be at the table in a collaborative Scriptural study; 2) that the process reflect that women, as well as men, are the church to which St. Paul wrote, "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another." (Col 3:16); and 3) that the study examine presuppositions with which all previous studies on the woman's issue begin. In the words of one vice-president, we were suggesting a "seismic change" in the process of how the Scriptural study on the man/woman relationship was being conducted.

Subsequent to that meeting, the CTCR staff announced the names of eight women and eight men invited to a consultation process dedicated to completing the Resolution 3-10 assignment. Seven of the men were seminary or university theology professors, the majority having published works that affirm the submission of woman to the headship authority of man; the eighth was a district president. I was again among the women invited; noticeably absent, however, were LCMS women with knowledge of biblical languages and theological degrees comparable to the men.

The woman will submit

The first consultation began with a CTCR staff report on the considerable work done by the Commission on the questions embedded in Resolution 3-10. There followed three keynote addresses. The first was given by a theologian who had previously argued that "the man's priority in the order of creation lays on him the responsibility of leadership, while the woman is to be helpful (Genesis 2:18), submissive, supportive and complementary. . . . Both at home and at church ('in everything' Eph 5:24) the woman will submit in a self-giving manner to the man's authority." In his consultation keynote he stated, "Although woman is equal in nature, her creation as the man's helper and his naming of her point to the expectation that she be subordinate. Her identity is tied up with that of her husband." The second keynoter suggested the study jettison a Law/Gospel approach as "too narrowly Lutheran."

In the third keynote address Dr. Barbara Brunworth called attention to the cognitive dissonance LCMS women experience when they hear

conflicting messages regarding God's will for women. She concluded, "There is still an elephant in the room that I have not acknowledged. Is all this about ordaining women? No. And yes. LCMS cannot be afraid of seeking a fuller understanding of God's intent for male(s) and female(s) in His kingdom at this point in history because humans (some males and some females) are afraid it will lead to ordination of women." The remainder of the consultation was devoted to identifying issues related to the male/female relationship.

Still no Scripture study

In preparation for the second consultation, participants were asked to prioritize the constellation of issues and comment on how uncertainty about these issues impacts the mission of the church and their personal lives. One woman expressed the concern that by allowing the ordination of women to set the agenda the Synod will miss an opportunity to prepare a Scriptural study that addresses the relationship of all men to all women in church, home and society. Another suggested that the CTCR document *Racism in the Church* could provide a helpful model for the proposed study. The second consultation, as the first, concluded without participants engaging in the study of Scripture called for in Resolution 3-10.

Following the second consultation, a drafting committee consisting of three woman and three men was appointed. One of the men prepared the 110-page initial draft of *The Creator's Tapestry* – prior to any actual Scriptural study by invited consultants. He began by stating that persons who honor Biblical truth will accept the draft's interpretation of Genesis 2. This was not a new theme for this theologian; two years prior to the consultations, in a seminary video, he had stated, "Adam, first, then Eve. That's God's order. It's a powerful theological argument." He had gone on to say that the question of how man and woman relate to each other is answered in Genesis 2.

Different point of departure

Discussion of the first draft dominated the third consultation. Other than occasional references to Biblical texts mentioned in the draft, neither round table discussions nor the plenary sessions engaged in the actual study of Scripture. Following the meeting, two of the women, Dr. Brunworth and I, on

our own initiative submitted written papers to the Commission. Dr. Brunworth called attention to the absence of Biblical study and offered her extensive scriptural study of the male/female relationship for possible consideration. My paper included resources dealing with the various meanings of *kephale* (head) in the Pauline epistles, resources on the relationship of Christ to all who are His Body, the Church, and a challenge to the sequence of creation as defining God's design for the male/female relationship.

On the basis of our written comments the two of us were each granted one hour at the fourth consultation to comment on the process and content of *The Creator's Tapestry*. Dr. Brunworth stated that in spite of valiant efforts by the drafting committee, the new draft failed to address divergent understandings of Scripture expressed at the consultations, or to acknowledge that these views each resulted from respect for Scripture and its truth.

My own presentation questioned why a study based on the Apostles' Creed titled the sections on the three articles in terms of man and woman rather than God, and suggested that such an approach focuses on the creature rather than on the Creator. Quoting Luther, "We know our theology is certain because it sets us outside ourselves," I proposed the study begin with the nature of God revealed in the Incarnate and written Word. This would be, as the drafter pointed out, a decidedly different point of departure for the study.

Disingenuous process

Months after this final consultation, participants received a greatly enhanced third draft. The newly written preface promises a future Part II that will further identify and study additional issues having to do with the relationship of man and woman. Also new is a warning against rejecting the third use of the law as a guide for conducting the man/woman relationship in the church and home. Footnotes throughout the Summary Reflections cite previous CTCR studies to support the paper's stated conclusion that the biblical complementary view of marriage is the basis for understanding the relationship of man and woman in the church. Just as in marriage the wife's submission to and support of the husband's headship complements his leadership and authority, so also in the church the submission of women to male headship supports male spiritual

leadership and authority.

Thus the consultation process ended where it began. Women came to the table and left the table subject to men invested with power and authority to determine that Scripture instructs husbands/men to lovingly exercise spiritual authority and leadership in the home and church. The men who designed the process, selected the participants, set the agenda and wrote the conclusion agreed that husbands ought to listen to their wives, and that future CTCR discussions should continue to give women opportunity to offer their insights and concerns. However, God's masterful beautiful design for order and unity in the church is that wives/women submit to the headship authority and leadership of husbands/men.

Inviting an equal number of women as men and allowing women to speak cannot mask a disingenuous process that protected the power of men to authoritatively define God's design for male authority in the church and home. Men, from a position of power, set an uneven table and invited women to a study where the conclusion was in place before the banquet of the Word was permitted to engage the minds and hearts of men and women. The elephant in the LCMS living room is, as Barbara Brunworth suggested, fear that engaging women and men in a mutually collaborative study of Scripture will lead to the ordination of women.

At the December 2009 CTCR meeting one member described *The Creator's Tapestry* as the Commission's "finest hour." This statement was made even though the study fails to offer insight into how Scripture applies the order of creation and the headship principle to all women in relation to all men. Much time and money was spent on identifying issues and addressing questions embedded in Resolution 3-10 rather than the study of Scripture, and the result simply rehashes studies predating the 1969 decision to grant women suffrage. Like its predecessors, *The Creator's Tapestry* fails to provide a clear coherent Biblical explanation for its stated conclusion that the marriage relationship of one woman and one man, not God's relationship to men and to women, is the basis for relationships in the church, home and society

Marie Meyer, a retired LCMS deaconess, is Secretary of the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau Board of Directors.

Omnium gatherum



Yin and yang • The Sierra Pacific Synod is sponsoring a workshop entitled “Managing Polarities in Congregations.” It is led by retired ELCA pastor Roy Oswald, who used to be with the Alban Institute but now is directing something called “Center for Emotional Intelligence and Human Relations Skills.” “Managing polarities” is way more positive than “dealing with conflict,” don’t you think? But maybe that’s not fair. The brochure explains that “a polarity is a pair of truths that need each other over time. When an argument is about two poles of a polarity, both sides are right and need each other to experience the whole truth.” Be assured that “this phenomenon has been recognized and written about for centuries in philosophy and religion. It is at the heart of Taoism, where we find the familiar polarity of yin and yang energy.” Should you still need encouragement to attend, just know that “research is clear: leaders and organizations that manage polarities well outperform those who don’t.” I personally would favor dropping the designation “rostered leaders” in favor of “polarity managers.” Anything to improve performance.

Howard Hong • We were saddened to hear of the death of Howard Hong, at the age of 97. Hong made significant contributions to the world of Lutheranism, and to the world at large, and in quite different areas. He was first of all a humanitarian, a key player in the Lutheran response to war-torn Europe and one of the architects of Lutheran refugee ministry. But he was also a scholar, perhaps the preeminent translator of the works of Kierkegaard into English. His life and ministry is one more reminder that God is good to his people. *Requiescat in pace.*

What, no chocolate bunnies? • If you are on the e-mail list of Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, you were treated to a Maundy Thursday greeting from “students, faculty, staff, and board” of the seminary. Nice gesture, and one hates to be so picky, but couldn’t a seminary find a “Happy Easter” banner for the top of this message with artwork a little more appropriate than flowers and baby chickies? I know it’s hard to do a graphic of an empty tomb, but really . . . baby chickies?

Seminary compost • Another ELCA’s seminary, Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, held a liturgical rite blessing a new campus composter. I’m all for the care of creation, but come on now. The seminary web site explained: “Composting is . . . the Gospel. Out of death and decay, God works in creation to bring about new life. All people everywhere to take part [*sic*] in the great divine narrative of creation—compost!” So much comes to mind to say, and so little of it can be said in a family newsletter. I just hope they used plenty of incense.

Ministry muddles • Last issue I reflected on the ELM 17, those persons “ordained” by Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries, some of whom are now chomping at the bit to be “received on to the roster” of the ELCA, whatever that means. Really the reflection was just as much about the muddled ELCA doctrine of ministry, or lack thereof. One can find evidence of this in all sorts of places. *The Lutheran* recently carried a news story about the lifting of the censure against Abiding Peace Lutheran Church in North Kansas City, MO. They were censured, it says, “for hiring a pastor in a committed same-sex relationship.” That phrase has at least three obvious errors: first, in the ELCA congregations *call* pastors, they don’t *hire* them; second, when they *called* Donna Simon, she wasn’t yet a pastor but a “candidate” approved by the Extraordinary Candidacy Project; and third, the congregation was actually censured for calling a pastor not on the ELCA roster. The article goes on to say that “the St. Paul Area Synod in February added Anita Hill to the ELCA clergy roster.” No doubt the synod would like to have done that, but that’s not actually how it works in the ELCA. The synod’s candidacy committee voted that she “be received . . . pending the implementation of the . . . policy changes.” At *The Lutheran’s* press time, she had not yet “been added to the clergy roster,” and won’t be unless and until the policy changes are approved and she takes part in the proposed “rite of reception.” If the news writers of the ELCA’s official magazine don’t understand these things, no wonder the church is so confused.

Other confusions • If *The Lutheran’s* news writers got some of the nuances wrong in that article, they

missed the boat big time in reporting – or shall I say “distorting”? – Lutheran CORE’S February proposal to create the North American Lutheran Church. The report begins, “Saying they are done with efforts to reform the ELCA. . . .” Anybody who knows the leadership of Lutheran CORE, or, for that matter, anybody who read their actual proposal, realizes they are not “done with efforts to reform the ELCA” but, in fact, many in Lutheran CORE are committed to remaining in the ELCA for precisely that purpose.

Sorry, no • I actually know that at least the editor of *The Lutheran*, Daniel Lehmann, has a pretty good idea of what Lutheran CORE is all about. That makes it all the more surprising to me that he refused to accept an ad from CORE for their theological conference next August in Columbus, OH. The conference theme is “Seeking New Directions for Lutheranism,” and it features several theological heavyweights, all, far as I know, ELCA members in good standing, at least at present. One would assume that editors don’t normally get involved in specific decisions about advertising, but in this case Lehmann himself made the call. “I realize Lutheran CORE is attempting to keep a foot in both camps: being a reform movement in the ELCA while creating a [new] denomination of Lutherans,” he told the CORE folks. But “it can’t work that way in the pages of the magazine.” CORE’s proposal for a new Lutheran church body, he said, is “schismatic,” and *The Lutheran* will not promote it. The financially strapped magazine must feel pretty strongly about this to refuse an \$1100 ad. But finances aside, this seems like a bad call. *The Lutheran* advertises all

kinds of things having no official relationship to the ELCA – travel agencies, retirement communities, commercial groups – and yet they can’t accept an ad for a conference led by ELCA theologians? To his credit, Lehmann was quite straightforward with the CORE people: it’s my call, he said, and I’m saying “no.” A couple of CORE leaders have said to me that they appreciate his candor, which does not always seem to be characteristic of ELCA officials in their experience. *Forum Letter* doesn’t normally run ads for anybody; but since *The Lutheran* refused this one, we’ll publish it as a public service, and we won’t even charge an \$1100 fee. We’ll go further and recommend that you attend. – roj

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