



A Crisis of Faith in the ELCIC

The Ordination of a Non-celibate Homosexual Man “Extra Ordinem” and its Consequences

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A crisis of faith has arisen in our ELCIC; a crisis of authority. A renegade congregation’s act of protest, specifically, their ordination of a self professed and non-celibate homosexual man, coupled with the response of our leadership, has many in our church seeking answers to some fundamental questions. Who is in charge? What is the policy of our church with respect to same gender marriage and the ordination of non-celibate homosexuals? What is the way forward?

The Defiant Act of Protest by an ELCIC Congregation:

Friday evening May 16, 2008, Mr. Lionel Ketola, a self described and sexually active homosexual man, was ordained a minister of Word and Sacrament at Holy Cross Lutheran Church, ELCIC, Newmarket, Ontario. Pre-ordination publicity indicated that more than fifty (50) clergy would attend the ordination, including, clergy from the United Church of Canada, the Anglican Church of Canada, and Lutheran clergy from Canada and the US.

Bishops normally ordain candidates for ministry of word and sacrament. Our active and retired bishops declined to ordain Mr. Ketola. Rostered pastors of the Eastern Synod conducted this ordination. If the bishops of the ELCIC all refused to ordain Mr. Ketola, one may ask by what right could this ordination take place? Mr. Ketola was ordained “*extra ordinem*” or “outside the regular rule.” The ordination was conducted under provisions from the Book of Concord which permit ordination by a congregation when bishops unreasonably refuse to ordain candidates. These provisions include statements made in certain writings found in the Book of Concord including provisions of the “*Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope*” page 332 paragraph 72 and Article X, Part III paragraph 1-3 of the “*Smalcald Articles*.”¹

When the reformers ordained pastors in the emerging Evangelical Church, the very performance of the rite of ordination was an act of ecclesial protest against the Roman church. These ordinations represented a challenge to the Roman Church’s interpretation of Holy Scripture with respect to the structure of the church, the fitness of a candidate for ordination and the Roman Church’s belief that it possessed the exclusive right and authority to ordain priests and pastors. The Evangelical Church’s “extra ordinem” ordination of married heterosexual men represented one of many acts of protest which ultimately led to complete separation of the reformers and their adherents from the Roman Church. The reformers ordained married heterosexual men as pastors because they believed the Roman church unreasonably refused to ordain married men. They reasoned that the scriptures ordained marriage as an order of creation. Scriptures urged men and women to marry, be fruitful and multiply. Further, they reasoned that no scripture prohibited the marriage of clergy. Holy Cross congregation unilaterally invoked the same principle with respect to the ordination of non-celibate homosexuals. By this act of ecclesial protest, Holy Cross declared that the refusal of the Bishops of the ELCIC to ordain a non-celibate gay man is on par with the refusal of the Roman church to ordain a married heterosexual man. Is this true? No!

¹ Tappert, Theodore, The Book of Concord, Fortress Press, Philadelphia (1959).

The Policies of the ELCIC Holy Cross Defied by the Subject Ordination:

The ELCIC's governing documents delegate certain roles to congregations, synods and the national church. In the Lutheran tradition, the Gospel is to be preached and the Sacraments are to be administered by a Pastor certified by our church and called by a congregation of the ELCIC. A fundamental role of the national and synodical bodies of our church is to recruit, educate, equip, certify, set standards for, train, guide, credential, examine, ordain and mentor qualified pastors. By way of example, according to Section 1 of Bylaw 1 of the BC Synod's constitution, the synod shall:

- Ordain ministerial candidates and receive, nurture, support, and discipline ordained ministers;
- Recruit, approve, supervise, and support ministerial candidates.
- Co-operate with this Church to provide for theological education at Lutheran Theological Seminary, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and elect two members to its Board of Governors.
- Provide for higher education for the members of this Church and others and for ministry to persons engaged in higher education at universities and colleges on its territory.

In addition congregations have delegated the right to answer questions regarding social issues and matters of life and faith to our national church. Homosexuality, homosexual behavior, marriage and family are matters of faith and life of the church. Our governing documents require that they be studied in light of the word of God, our confessions of faith and the teachings of the church. Homosexuality, marriage and family are also social issues inasmuch as they intersect with and are a part of secular life. Changes in the secular definition of marriage and family will impact the church; therefore the church must study such changes in light of the Word of God. The official policy of the ELCIC is that marriage is defined as a lifelong relationship between one man and one woman, to the exclusion of all others. The Lutheran confessions define marriage between a man and a woman as a natural right, and a divine ordinance stamped on creation (Art. XXIII of the Augsburg Confession & Apology). The confessions declare that this definition cannot be altered (Smalcald Articles Pt. III Art. XI) The ELCIC's policy on human sexuality, marriage and family teaches that God's intent for the expression of human sexuality is within the bonds of marriage. The existing policy of the ELCIC is that those who engage in homosexual acts are sinners separated from God and neighbor. This policy is supported by Genesis 1:1-2:24, Leviticus 18:22, 24, and 20:13; Romans 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. The highest legislative authority in the ELCIC has twice rejected motions which would have permitted the blessing of same gender couples.

The Subject Ordination Usurped Authority and Normalized, Blessed and Legitimized Many Things.

By ordaining Mr. Ketola, Holy Cross congregation has effectively normalized, blessed and legitimized many things and has assumed authority over many things.

First, a man has been ordained who admittedly engages in a pattern of living which Holy Scripture and our confessions of faith have been interpreted to prohibit. A line has been crossed. The people of Holy Cross Lutheran Church of Newmarket affirmed, solemnly testified and declared that Mr. Ketola had received a call from God to the ministry of Word and Sacrament in His church. The man ordained is a married man, specifically, married to another man under the civil law of Canada. His ordination therefore declares that entry into the estate of marriage by a same gender couple is not a bar to the ordination of either member of the couple. His ordination effectively legitimates and blesses same gender marriage in that congregation. Therefore, no impediment exists for any same gender couple to get married in Holy Cross Congregation and thereafter be ordained in the Holy Cross congregation.

Second, Mr. Ketola was not examined and certified by the Eastern Synod of the ELCIC as a candidate for ordination to a ministry of Word and Sacrament. The policies and procedures of both the ELCIC and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, (ELCA), our sister church in the US, prohibit the ordination of a self-described and practicing homosexuals. He was certified for a call by a para-church organization called "Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries" ("*ELM*"). ELM is an advocacy group from the US which seeks to ordain gays and lesbians in our sister church in the US, the ELCA and now the ELCIC. ELM claims it has certified the ordination of two lesbian pastors in the US and Ketola will be the first gay man certified by the group in Canada. The ELM claims that Mr. Ketola completed a two year internship at Holy Cross Lutheran Church under the

supervision of an ELCA seminary in Philadelphia, PA, USA. In addition it is claimed Mr. Ketola underwent rigorous testing and evaluation by ELM. *ELM has no official status whatsoever in either the ELCIC or the ELCA.* By this extra ordinem ordination, a reasonable person could conclude, the congregation placed ELM as the only authority above the congregation for the purpose of recruiting, examining and certifying their pastors.

Third, the ELCIC sitting in convention refused to delegate to congregations and then synods the right to make decisions with respect to how congregations will be in mission for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered (“GLBT”) people, including whether or not to bless their unions. Mr. Ketola was called not only as associate pastor of Holy Cross, but also as an Ambassador of Reconciliation, with a mandate to work toward the removal of all bars from the full participation of GLTB people in the life of the church. His call directs him to undertake his mission at the congregational, synodical and national level in the ELCIC. By this act, Holy Cross congregation has unilaterally declared that it possesses the authority to work at all levels of government of the church to bring about a change in attitude and practice toward GLBT people.

How did all this happen? Mr. Ketola’s internship did not occur in a vacuum or in the dark. Holy Cross congregation did not put their intern under a bushel basket. His internship was served in the light of day. Bishop Pryse and the Synod Council of the Eastern Synod must have known of the existence of this internship and that it did not conform to the synod’s constitution, bylaws and policies and the teachings of the Eastern Synod and the ELCIC. If the synod and the office of the Bishop were aware of the internship and its irregularity, they had a duty to act decisively, that is, to demand that the Holy Cross congregation cease and desist or face discipline. The time to intervene with disciplinary proceedings was when the internship and certification process began more than two years ago. If disciplinary procedures had been instituted at the beginning of the internship process, repentance, contrition and reconciliation would have been possible without a line being crossed which could irreparably damage the already strained web of interconnections between congregations of the ELCIC.

The Subject Ordination is a Symptom of an Underlying Pathology.

Mr. Ketola’s ordination is a symptom of the state of affairs in our ELCIC. It is symptomatic of an underlying condition in our church. We have a kind of multiple personality disorder. We have many opinions, ideas, and understandings about human sexuality, homosexuality, homosexual behavior, marriage and family. These diverse opinions, and the groups who hold them, have driven our church body and individuals within the ELCIC to act in strange and inconsistent ways.

Twice the national convention voted down motions which would have permitted the blessing of same gender couples. Yet, the leadership of the church continues to move down the path of removing any impediments to full participation in the life in church for GLBT people. The national convention has consistently voted in candidates whose stated aim is to move the ELCIC in a direction which would include removing any impediments to full participation in the life in church for GLBT people and then consistently blocking efforts on the part of the leadership to bring their aspirations to fruition. Resolutions and movements in the church around the issue of the blessing of same gender couples seems to have caused the executive and the legislative bodies of our church to work at cross purposes. This state of affairs causes many to ask whether the national convention and the leadership in our church are in charge of the affairs of the church any more.

Holy Cross congregation issued a call to Mr. Ketola and he accepted the call. A service of ordination was celebrated, the usual questions were asked and the usual answers were given, a sermon was preached, and hands were laid on Mr. Ketola. The process of call and ordination violated the constitution of Holy Cross congregation (unless the Eastern Synod Council approved revisions to Holy Cross’ constitution which would have permitted the call and ordination of a pastor not on the roster of a synod of the ELCIC or is qualified to be admitted to any such roster). Mr. Ketola’s ordination at Holy Cross did not, in and of itself, qualify him for admission to the roster of pastors of the Eastern Synod or for that matter any synod of the ELCIC. Mr. Ketola is not authorized to act as a minister of word and sacrament at Holy Cross congregation or any other ELCIC congregation. He has no standing in the ELCIC as a Minister of Reconciliation. One must ask, what did Mr. Ketola, the congregation and fifty pastors really accomplish by the service of ordination? Perhaps by this action Holy Cross unilaterally started a new

Lutheran denomination with the blessing of 50 clergy. This sad state of affairs causes one to question who is in charge at Holy Cross congregation?

Prior to Mr. Ketola's extra ordinem ordination, Bishop Pryse very publically warned Holy Cross congregation not to proceed or face discipline, which could result in the congregation's exclusion from the Eastern Synod and the ELCIC. He also publically warned pastors of the Eastern Synod not to participate in Ketola's ordination or face discipline, which at its most extreme could mean removal from the roster of clergy. The ordination took place. Will Bishop Pryse follow through with the threats he made prior to the subject ordination? Will he appoint a committee tasked with the responsibility of determining whether Holy Cross congregation should be subject to discipline for ordaining Mr. Ketola, and, if grounds for discipline are found, impose discipline? Will an investigative committee be appointed to investigate the actions of the ELCIC clergy involved in the ordination? Will the pastors involved be found to have committed acts which violate the governing documents, policies and teachings of the Eastern Synod and the ELCIC? If evidence of the violation of the governing documents and teachings of the church is found, will the ELCIC pastors who participated in Ketola's ordination face a disciplinary committee? Will the disciplinary committee find the subject pastors committed acts which subject them to discipline and impose discipline on the pastors involved? Will the defiant congregation be excluded from membership in the Eastern Synod and the ELCIC? Will the names of some or all of the pastors involved in this extra ordinem ordination be removed from the roster of pastors? Will the congregation or any pastor appeal any discipline imposed to the ELCIC's Court of Adjudication?

It is at this precise moment in time that our church needs real leadership, and Bishop Pryse could offer this leadership. He could affirm the authority of the Bishop's office over ordination by taking Holy Cross congregation and the pastors involved to task for their participation in an ordination which was outside the authority of the congregation and clergy involved. Based on Bishop Pryse's statement in his June 2008 Bishop's journal, it is very doubtful his pre-ordination threats will come to pass. Bishop Pryse wrote:

"For the sake of our much larger common mission, I think it's time for us to recognize and accept our differences on this question [Ketola's ordination], and to allow different expressions of our church to follow alternate paths. I am of the opinion that an individual's sexual orientation should not impact his/her ability to participate in the church's approved candidacy processes. Congregations should be free to call or not call any approved candidate that they wish. Congregations and pastors should have the freedom to marry or not marry whoever they wish according to the dictates of conscience." http://www.easternsynod.org/docs/bishopsjournal/Bishops_Journal_June2008.pdf

The Eastern Synod will meet in convention July 9-13, 2008. The Bishop's journal piece seems to beg for a response from delegates to the Eastern Synod's convention. It calls someone to rise up and propose a motion to bring the Bishop's vision for the synod to fruition in some way. Following the ELCA model, a motion from the floor could be made and seconded which asks the convention to vote to abate investigative and disciplinary proceedings against Holy Cross congregation and clergy involved in the subject ordination, pending the resolution of the bigger questions of human sexuality, homosexuality, homosexual behavior, marriage, family and the church in the much anticipated revised and restated policy on human sexuality. As delegates to the synod convention, the pastors involved in the extra ordinem ordination would be permitted to vote to abate the discipline which they could face. A motion could be made from the floor which could effectively create a local option for Eastern Synod congregations on the issues of marriage and ordination. Bishop Pryse's opinion that sexual orientation should not be a bar to the candidacy process for ordination or the rite of marriage would become the law of the land in the Eastern Synod (which would be implemented on a congregation by congregation basis).

The ELCIC's National Church Council ("NCC") would have to review any action of the Eastern Synod, including, a motion to abate discipline and/or a new local option for same gender marriage and the ordination of gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgendered ("GLBT") people. The last time the NCC ruled on an action of the Eastern Synod, they admonished the synod for implementing a synodical local option for blessing same gender couples. The NCC declared that the delegates at the national convention voted down a local option and the will of the national convention must be respected. The NCC then turned around and placed a motion on the agenda of the very next national convention which asked the delegates to the national convention to affirm that synods have jurisdiction

over mission, including the mission to “GLBT” people. The NCC resolution further stated that the mission to GLBT people could take the form of blessing same gender relationships. Synods should therefore be permitted to enact a local option to bless same gender couples. This motion was defeated. If history repeats itself, and the Eastern Synod passes another local option for marriage and ordination of GLBT people, the NCC’s action will most likely put a resolution on the docket for the 2009 national convention which would allow all ELCIC congregations to determine who will be blessed or married, and ordained in a congregation, and who will not, including GLBT people. It is possible that the leadership of the ELCIC will ask the national convention to vote to change the direction of the mission of our church once more. Will the convention finally follow the will of its leadership or will it vote in opposition to the stated desires of its leadership? Only God knows what would happen to such a motion.

The Way Forward.

Who is in control? Where are we going? If our ELCIC were a ship under sail, our current state of affairs suggests that we are going off course because of problems at the helm of our ship. There are many hands on the steering wheel and each group of hands wants to go a certain way. One group of hands wants to steer the ship on a particular course. This course seeks to create a truly inclusive church, a church in which a person’s sexual orientation and gender identity are not a bar to marriage and ordination. Another group of hands wants to steer the ship in the direction of becoming a transformational church, a church which recognizes that all people regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity are welcome as sinners in need of repentance, forgiveness and transformation to a life which conforms to God’s loving purpose for the expression of human sexuality within heterosexual marriage. Right now the ship is not going in any particular direction. The attention of those at the wheel is directed to gaining control of the wheel and not the waters in front of us. How long can this go on? What is the way forward?

Bishop Pryse actually offers sage advice with respect to a way forward. He correctly points out that there are two expressions, understandings and visions in our church for the inclusion of GLBT people in the life of the family of God. The challenge is, can these two expressions and visions for the direction of the ELCIC really and practically exist together in one church at the same time? Is it really possible for the ELCIC to be faithful to God and be in mission in the world for God if one group in our church has a vision which affirms and encourages GLBT people to remain as they are and another group that encourages the complete transformation and reorientation of their lives? No! These two visions cannot co-exist. Their proponents have struggled for the wheel of the ship and will continue to vie for the steering wheel of the ship. Why? Why can’t these two visions co-exist? The answer is simple and basic.

In the Brief Order of Confession before Holy Communion in the LBW, we confess that we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves. The confession declares only Jesus can free us from sin through his innocent sufferings and death. We ask God to have mercy on us, forgive us, renew us, and lead us so we can delight in his will and walk in his ways. The question which must be asked is this: “Does the normalization of homosexuality and homosexual behavior, together with the sanctioning the marriage of GLBT people and the ordination of non-celibate GLBT people, by reinterpretation of scriptures which are contrary through historical critical exegesis of the offending texts, work freedom from bondage to sin, death and the Devil for GLBT people?” We do not believe so. Even if bishops, scholars and wise men and women rise up and support these reforms and congregations who agree to this progressive Christianity grow by leaps and bounds, and do great and miraculous things, if it is not God’s will it is all for naught. Read Matthew 7:21-23. If individuals and congregations believe same gender marriage and the ordination of non-celibate homosexuals is not God’s will, is it possible to support, endorse or encourage the same in any way? Those individuals and congregations will have to prayerfully consider whether it is possible to be in communion with, or, share a ship with, a group who will marry same gender couples and ordain non-celibate GLBT people. If it is not possible to stay together, and the captains of the ship are adamant that their ship will sail in the direction of increasing inclusivity, the options are few. Capitulate and sail along, or seek a new vessel.

May God bless our deliberations.

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