

The Core Issue of the ELCA Decision & Saint Paul's Response

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Let me start this post by saying that I really didn't want to devote another post to the conflict at Saint Paul's regarding the ELCA's decision. My two previous ones concerning it have dealt extensively with all that is involved.

This said, the other day I came across an old article in the Anglican Theological Review written by my former professor Paul Zahl that pointedly expresses just what is at stake in the blessing of unrepentant "publicly accountable life-long, monogamous, same-gender relationships." This being the case, I felt compelled to share it with you.

As some of you may know, several years ago the Episcopal Church made basically the same decision concerning human sexuality that the ELCA made this August. Zahl, who was on the losing side of the argument, published the following article as a plea for grace on the part of the victors. In it he first addresses the issue of homosexuality in theological terms and then asks for the grace to maintain those beliefs within the Episcopal Church. It is from the first part of this article that our quote comes from. In it he dynamically hits the core of just what is at stake in the debate over human sexuality. Zahl writes:

"So what is the big deal? Why do people like me stand against the Gene Robinson consecration and the blessing of same-sex unions? Why do we feel these two things are destructive of life in the Christian church? I note in passing that our struggle against them so far has been unsuccessful, failed, and demoralizing for the zeal and good conscience of our ministries. Why is the issue so important?"

"First, we believe the gay position as we hear it **undermines the anthropology of the gospel**. It undermines the teaching concerning the inherent sinfulness of the creature before the Creator. It wants to exempt a particular category of persons, gay men and lesbians, from original sin on the basis that they are "created" a certain way, therefore how can it be wrong? For reasons beyond our human understanding we are all created sinners: distorted, inverted, libidinal, and narcissistic. Our baggage is psychogenetic, not the sum of our deeds. The gay argument confuses creation with redemption—as in the old 1970s poster "God don't make no junk." That was a half-truth then, and it is a half-truth now. The core, universal, and seemingly impenetrable claim of the gay lobby is this: ***If I came into the world this way, then how can it be wrong? That claim is in opposition to the classic Christian doctrine, Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant, of the human being as being intrinsically and inherently fallen in all cases.*** The claim is Arminian explicitly and Pelagian implicitly."

"If the anthropology is flawed, then inevitably the soteriology is flawed. If "God don't make no junk," then what need is there for a savior? Why did Christ have to die on the cross, if the need of the human race were not rooted in our paralysis and inability to help ourselves? The result of an overly high anthropology is an overly low soteriology."

"The result of an overly low soteriology is a weak Christology. ***If Christ is not a savior in the full and plain sense of the word, then he did not have to be God.*** The whole encounter of Jesus with the Pharisees in Mark 2, when he made a connection between his divine authority and the forgiveness of sins, ceases to mean anything. High anthropology means low soteriology means inadequate Christology."

“Finally, the Trinitarian implications of the weak Christology implicit in the gay lobby's argument—become now the Episcopal Church's argument, it seems—are devastating. The Son who is no savior becomes automatically subordinate to the Father. We are quickly into Arianism and what we today call unitarianism. Now most theological liberals I know in ECUSA insist that they are Trinitarian Christians. And I believe them. But I wonder whether they have realized the implications for the whole of theology of the overly high anthropology of the arguments we have been hearing from the gay lobby and their friends. Please, think through the implications of a weakened profile of original sin.” (Zahl 648-649 emphases mine)

So that's the core of the issue. Saint Paul's stance is not some homophobic, ungraceful, legalistic rant against a sinful lifestyle; but rather it's ***a holding firm to the very content of the Gospel itself.***

Zahl, Paul. (2004). Last signal to the Carpathia. *Anglican Theological Review*, 86(4), 647-652

Also See: Zahl, Paul. [Grace in Practice.](#)