



## Intimacy and Respect

I remember being appalled a few years back when I read an article by a pastor supporting his sexual involvement with a minor parishioner as an appropriate expression of pastoral care—a kind of self-giving love to accept, comfort, and support the other in a time of distress and doubt. This was an especially blatant example (if only because of the perpetrator's bald defense of his actions) of the misuse of the pastoral office to exploit sexually another person—an exploitation sometimes arising from power and deliberate manipulation, sometimes from weakness and unthinking carelessness.

But we seem to recognize these dangers now. In schools, agencies, and congregations, we have adopted lengthy—often legalistic—statements on sexual harassment; state laws regarding harassment and abuse have been extended to religious professionals; and we warn ourselves and our counselors to keep an appropriate emotional and sexual distance from parishioners and counselees.

This concern is neither new nor silly. I learned in seminary that Chrysostom counseled young pastors never to go alone to visit the widows. Given the power of sexual attraction and the reality of human sin, it will not do to rely on will power, good intentions, or even personal integrity (as important as that will be) in this area. We need the law to do its protecting work; we need the help of external structures; we need to recapture an appropriate sense of taboo, to know that “such a thing is not done in Israel” (2 Sam 13:12).

Yet, at the same time, if we are to care for one another after the manner of the foot-washing Jesus, we need to risk intimacy and touch. The other danger is that we become so careful, so sterile, so protected, so detached in our encounters they become clinical—hardly human, much less Christian. Christian love involves the vulnerability of the giver, not only of the recipient. It cannot always maintain emotional distance; it cannot be adequately defined and regulated by the language of the lawsuit and the social sciences; it cannot be made safe. It is a form of laying down one's life for the other.

Which is precisely why our encounters of intimacy, inevitably touched by sexuality, are so subject to abuse, so fraught with danger. We will need from one another all the help we can get in properly applying the Word of God to this area of our lives, to learn how to respect the integrity of the other person even as we are called to relate in the intimacy of *agape*—to allow the law to protect us from ourselves and from one another and the gospel to set us free for unqualified love.

These were the kind of questions on the table when we planned this issue. The articles are offered to help us reflect together on these important matters.

Before moving to the theme, the issue opens with the second in a series of four articles marking the tenth anniversary of this journal. *Elizabeth Achtemeier* reflects on our theme, “Theology for Christian Ministry,” from the perspective of her work as a seminary teacher of Bible and homiletics. *Word & World* shares her conviction

that the education of pastors and lay associates must combine the best of scientific study and confessional commitment.

*Roland Martinson* introduces the theme of the issue by carefully working through definitions of sexuality, intimacy, and boundaries. He spells out the implications of these definitions for Christian ministry and implicitly provides a platform upon which the succeeding essays build.

Pointing to the disarray surrounding the modern practice of marriage, *Robert Benne* suggests that the Christian virtues of faith, love, and hope can transform the personal and social responsibilities of marriage into uniquely Christian callings. Without being naive about current realities, Benne offers a strong, positive reaffirmation of a traditional Christian understanding of sex and marriage.

*William Hulme* traces the understanding of homosexuality through the history of western culture. He then turns to his own counseling practice to shed helpful light on this highly charged matter.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is now involved in discussion and controversy about its understanding of homosexuality—especially about the ordination of practicing homosexuals. Seminary faculty members are frequently asked to contribute to such discussions. We present in this issue five articles which arise from these conversations. Since the ELCA is not alone in this debate, we trust these articles will have value for other readers as well.

In the first contribution, *Timothy Lull*, academic dean at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, reflects on the common distinction between public and private conduct as it relates to sexuality, particularly with regard to clergy; he finally decides that Paul's distinction between those who are strong and those who are weak will be more helpful.

The next four articles were written by faculty at Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary. These articles are not meant to be definitive; not first written for publication, they are the work of teachers of the church, participating in and inviting public discussion of a critical issue. *David Tiede*, president and professor of New Testament, begins by attempting to establish a pastoral framework for the church's conversation on homosexuality. He calls the church to speak with civility and care on this matter, within the constraints of the gospel and responding to the witness of the biblical texts, and he presents a model for doing this. *Diane Jacobson*, who teaches Old Testament, examines the biblical understanding of sexuality. She points to significant texts and raises questions of contemporary interpretation. *Frederick Gaiser* and *Donald Juel*, speaking respectively from Old Testament and New Testament perspectives, discuss the texts generally referred to when questions arise about homosexuality. How will the church hear these texts in the late twentieth century?

In our regular "Face to Face" feature, *Mark Mollrem* draws from his Doctor of Ministry work to argue for the need of a new church ritual to recognize divorce; liturgist *Mons Teig* agrees with the need for ritual, but believes that church and its people are better served in this case with the order for confession and forgiveness. *Carl Volz* presents the lessons for Pentecost in "Texts in Context." Starting with Joel, he relates Pentecost to the Jewish expectation of the Day of the Lord.

F.J.G.