

opposing this tendency by the way we live, ought not be in itself a troublesome indicator that we may not, after all, be the believers we say we are. The bane of Methodism will always be the nagging question, Is this enough?

Even St. Paul grappled with his internal wickedness and his awareness of it: “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin” (Rom 7:24–25). And while our tendencies indicate our sinful nature, with the mind we are at the same time aware of what the Gospel is. It is not so much something that exists in the mind or in the heart. If it were, there would be plenty of reason either to double down on becoming better at discipline than the Methodists were, or to despair, and so to become slothful. Rather, the Gospel is something that exists in its being an account of an historical reality, that Christ lived and died for us, and rose again from the dead. As Scaer puts it, “The heart of the gospel as the justifying message is not its effect on the hearers, but Christ’s propitiation for sin.”¹³

And so we will do well to realize that our occasional leisure activities, whatever they are, must be nothing more than that, and for this reason, they must remain occasional, and limited. The deadliness of sloth is in its potential to draw us, ultimately, away from what is real. We live in a real world, with real families and real neighbors to whom we have real responsibilities. We live as real people who have really been reconciled to our God by the very real and verifiable sacrifice of Christ, as demonstrated by His very real resurrection from the dead. Thomas certainly learned this well, falling at once to his knees and declaring Him to be “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28). 

Notes

¹ The King James Version is quoted throughout this article.

² *The Wall Street Journal*, January 22–23, 2022.

³ “Is Gaming a Career? Can you Play Video Games as a Viable Career Choice?” May 21, 2001, esports.net/news/is-gaming-a-good-career.

⁴ “Video games and children: When do parents need to worry?” June 7, 2021, inquirer.com/health/expert-opinions/video-games-teens-behavior-parents-tips-20210607.html.

⁵ January 26, 2022, gottesdienst.org/podcast/2022/1/26/tgc-161-the-metaverse.

⁶ *Confessions*, Book III, Chapter 2.2, newadvent.org/fathers/110103.htm.

⁷ See “Novels, Novelists, & Readers; or, Text & Temptation in 19th-century America,” merrycoz.org/voices/NOVELS.xhtml.

⁸ “Devouring Books,” the *American Annals of Education* 1835, 30–32.

⁹ For a cursory view of Wesley’s life see Wikipedia s.v. Charles Wesley, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Wesley.

¹⁰ David P. Scaer, “Justification as the Starting Point of Doing Theology?” (*CTQ* 84 [2020]: 265–278), 267.

¹¹ Scaer, 268.

¹² For this reason I still prefer older wording of the Apostle’s Creed: crucified, dead, and buried. He *was dead*.

¹³ Scaer, 269. For another dose of Scaer on this, see “Finding the Starting Point: Inspiration, Justification, or Historical Criticism” (11–26 in *Leitourgiae Propria Adiaphoria Non Est: Essays in Honor of the Rev. Dr. Burnell F. Eckardt on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (Fort Wayne, IN: Emmanuel Press, 2021).

Commentary on the War: Toward Gaining Ground in the Ministry

Necessary Masculinity

David H. Petersen



For decades the Church’s masculinity crisis has been obvious to even the most casual observer. The Church in America has been severely feminized. In The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod women can’t hold the title “pastor,” but shy of consecrating the elements, there may be no function of the pastoral office that women don’t perform someplace in the LCMS. In the most extreme cases, during public worship services, women preach sermons, though they are usually called something else. Far more common, women read the lessons, lead prayers, distribute Holy Communion, and serve as acolytes. Sometimes they vest in such a way as to be indistinguishable to the casual observer from the ordained clergy. Women also vote in almost every voters assembly of the synod. They sometimes serve as congregational chairmen and as elders. Even when they aren’t in those particular offices, they are typically the bulk of the council, and they nearly always dominate the voters. It hardly seems a stretch to say that in the majority of the LCMS, all the important business and spiritual decisions are made by a majority of women. In addition to this, certain women are held up as public teachers who provide spiritual counsel and biblical instruction to men and women, clergy and laity alike. To some degree, it would seem that in the LCMS, the only acknowledged difference between men and women is that women can’t be called “pastor.” That is a real problem.

As problematic as this is, it is strangely difficult to talk about. It is not uncommon when a group of LCMS pastors gather, after first looking around to make certain no women can hear them, that they will lament that men don’t come to church and won’t take leadership roles. They want to do something about it, and they have some thoughts about what might be done, at least in an ideal world, but it feels so overwhelming and so potentially

unpopular that they simply do nothing. This column is meant to do two things: acknowledge the reality and something of how we came to this sad place, and suggest some practical steps for pastors and other leaders to take in order to gain back some ground.

How we got here is an age-old story: men have failed to live up to their sacrificial offices. Added to that problem is the endemic inability of the LCMS to deal adequately with anything that is “adiaphora.”

It could be a cause or it could be a symptom, but nothing is more illustrative of men’s failure to be men than the rise of birth control in the 1960s. Birth control, whether it is by blockage or murder, has detached intercourse from children. People can have intercourse without consequence. Once people could partake of the physical pleasures of holy marriage without sacrifice, many men abdicated their authority in the family. There was no burden of duty, and women no longer demanded commitment. As soon as they departed from the family, they also departed from Church and society. When one lives for himself in one sphere, he soon does so in all spheres.

This was less evident with women. I suspect that this was largely because sometimes there were still children. Some women, whether with a father on hand or not, took care of those children out of necessity. Thereby, even if they didn’t want to, they learned to love someone besides themselves and thus became leaders, who made sacrifices, not completely unlike Jael and Deborah. Still, of course, abortion provided women with a more devastating way to avoid sacrifice and wounded them even more deeply, while also teaching them both that men couldn’t be trusted and that their own life goals and dreams were more important than anything else, even more important than the life of a baby.

To deal with this kind of perverse society requires deliberate effort and strategy. The overall goal must be to build up families that support and love one another and raise up children in the fear of the Lord, that each of us would recognize and then fulfill our God-given vocations according to His Word, empowered by the forgiveness of sins. This goal cannot be assumed. It is empowered by the Gospel, but it is informed by the Law. Love covers a multitude of sins while the Table of Duties shows us what those sins are and what to strive for next time. The very first thing that our pastors must do is say, out loud, often, and in public, that men are the head of the household, that women are to be subordinate to their husbands, and that children are to be sought and then raised in the fear of the Lord. We must keep saying this until we can do so without blushing and without fear. All the members of the family sacrifice for one another, but following the model of Jesus Christ, as St. Paul lays it out in Ephesians 5—this is the primary duty of the husband and father.

We must also then consider how we have handled women’s roles in the church. *Adiaphora* matter. There are weaker and stronger choices, better and worse ceremonies. Some ceremonies uphold the God-ordained maleness of the clergy, such as only having male acolytes, and others uphold the God-ordained honor given to women such as having men not speak coarsely with women, opening doors for them, and treating them with dignity and respect. The Bible doesn’t demand the exact ceremonies, but ceremonies matter. Pastors and elders should think deeply about these things. And, of course, some things aren’t *adiaphora*. It is actually inappropriate for women to preach “children’s sermons” during the Divine Service. It is also inappropriate and misleading for women to vest and assist with the Distribution, to read the lessons, or lead the prayers. It is certainly to the shame of the men in any congregation where women serve as the chairmen or elders while able-bodied and capable men sit by idly. Men must be taught and exhorted to pick up their crosses and lay down, if not their lives—and that day may come—then at least their hobbies, finances, and amusements for their families, the church, and their neighbors.

As far as practical steps, the first is to repent. Whether it was ignorance, arrogance, or fear that kept pastors from addressing these things hardly matters now. I am a bit late to it myself. For me, it was mostly arrogance. Our congregation didn’t have female acolytes. The fathers brought the children to catechism. We had a lot of men at Sunday morning Bible study and several, strong, male social groups. I thought we were fine and I wrongly associated concerns about the Table of Duties and marriage with Church Growth gimmickry and flakiness. We might have been fine, but we weren’t what we should have been or could have been. Like me, I suspect most of our readers need to be awakened for reasons similar to mine.

My wakeup call began with Rev. David Buchs of Concordia Lutheran Church in Fairhaven, Minnesota and a talk that he gave at the 2020 Bugenhagen Conference. He inspired me to start teaching the elders about masculinity. I had no further plans, but my elders loved it. In fact, they loved it so much and got so excited that they practically demanded that we offer a men’s Bible study on masculinity. I still didn’t want to do it, but I was encouraged by their enthusiasm. Buchs gladly shared his material, and with his model in hand, we started a group. The men of the congregation responded with incredible enthusiasm. Excluding shut-ins and such, we had nearly 80% of our households represented and they have kept coming back. The women loved it also and got very interested. In response to the monthly men’s meetings, we held a very successful Saturday morning marriage retreat. The focus was for couples, and half the participants were women, but we also included singles. We provided

babysitting and a meal. We had a very hard talk about marriage, male headship, subordination, fidelity, pornography, and divorce. We had about 80 percent participation from all member households. They loved it. We are continuing the men's study and are looking at how to begin a similar study, led by the pastor, for women on female virtues as they are exhibited in holy marriage and by mothers. We also have a second marriage retreat scheduled for this fall.

I am not relating these recent developments to boast. I say it to my shame. My congregation was starving for solid, confessional, biblical teaching on their most basic vocations, and I was either oblivious or dismissed it because I was bored by it. My success isn't a real surprise; Buchs reports a similar response in Minnesota. I expect it would be met with similar enthusiasm in any *Gottesdienst* congregation.

I am not an expert in this topic, but I think my path could be imitated. Start with the elders. Start talking immediately about the crisis in our culture and the Church and how it is destroying families. Talk also about what steps might be taken in your practice to give a better witness to the masculinity of the Church's leadership and assist men in their God-given roles. Talk about it even if nothing can be done right away. With the elders on board, start and lead a men's group to teach the men about biblical masculinity, focusing, at least in the beginning, on Ephesians 5, Proverbs 31, and Genesis 2. See where it goes from there. Maybe you don't do a marriage thing, or maybe you start with that. If you ask, Buchs will share his material with you, and Frese and I will also. This is not simply worth doing, brothers; it is necessary. Perhaps this won't turn the tide of our society, but it will be of great and lasting benefit to your members. And maybe it can begin to turn the tide in the LCMS.



Sabre of Boldness

Räsänen and Pohjola Update: Trial, Charges, and Response

Jonathan E. Shaw



As followers of *Gottesdienst* will know, Dr. Päivi Räsänen, Member of the Parliament of Finland, was awarded the 2022 Sabre of Boldness on Jan. 19, 2022 in Fort Wayne, Indiana, USA, in absentia.¹ She is currently on trial together with the Rev. Dr. Juhana Pohjola, Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Mission Diocese of Finland, 2009 recipient of the Sabre of Boldness.

The charges against Dr. Räsänen and Bishop Pohjola stem from their clear confession of historic Christianity: that God made humanity in His image; that humanity fell from grace into concupiscence, sin, and death by disobeying the Word of God; that God out of love for humanity sent His Son into human flesh to redeem the world by His holy life, His substitutionary death, and His victorious resurrection from the dead; and that God now calls humanity to everlasting life in Christ through His Word of repentance and faith.

The problem in the eyes of the Prosecutor General of Finland is that Dr. Räsänen and Bishop Pohjola name homosexual activity as morally dangerous conduct and sin before God, calling for repentance and faith. Based on woke bias, the prosecutor hears this as hate speech toward those who self-identify as homosexuals. From here, the prosecutor extrapolates to a supposed legal basis for punishment: "Incitement to Hatred against a Group." The Criminal Code of Finland, Chapter 11 (War crimes and crimes against humanity), Section 10(a), prohibits aggravated ethnic agitation. In particular,

If the ethnic agitation involves incitement or enticement (1) to genocide or the preparation of genocide, a crime against humanity, an aggravated crime against humanity, a war crime, an aggravated war crime, murder, or manslaughter committed for terrorist intent, or (2) to serious violence other than what is referred to in paragraph 1 so that the act clearly endangers public order and safety, and the ethnic agitation also when assessed as a whole is aggravated, the offender shall be sentenced for aggravated ethnic agitation to imprisonment for at least four months and at most four years.²

Charges are based on three acts by Dr. Räsänen: (1) On June 17, 2019, she challenged the liberal state church's official partnership with the LGBT "Pride 2019" event. She tweeted an image of the Bible from Romans 1:24–27, and noted, "The Church has announced that it will be an official partner of Seta [the Finnish Organ for Sexual Equality] Pride 2019. How does the doctrinal foundation of the Church, i.e., the Bible, fit together with the idea that shame and sin can be elevated to be the object of pride?" (2) In a December 20, 2019 radio discussion program, Dr. Räsänen explained that her views on homosexuality were based on Scriptural teaching (creation, sin, and redemption) and science (that sexual behavior is grounded more in self-determination than genetics). (3) In 2004, Dr. Räsänen wrote the booklet, *Male and Female He Created Them: Homosexual Relationships Challenge the Christian Concept of Humanity*. In the pamphlet, she affirmed one man-one woman, lifelong marriage as God's creative gift, homosexual behavior as sin, and the church's ministry of love in Christ for all through Law and Gospel. Here Bishop