

BOUND CONSCIENCE: WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

By

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ABSTRACT

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Lauren R. Ley

An ELCA orthodox clergy explores the problematic nature of “bound conscience” as described in its formal documents: it moves the ELCA toward ethical relativism and gospel reductionism. Historical Lutheran uses of conscience are reviewed and compared to the biblical and larger church traditions. A constructive theology affirms the present direction while expressing reservations regarding its biblical faithfulness and fruitfulness toward greater Lutheran and ecumenical unity. Pragmatic recommendations are to: study ecclesiology and the teaching office; bishops acknowledge some responsibility for the present disunity; enact a Gamaliel-like discernment of the Spirit through a decade-long moratorium on changing present policy and teaching.

Preface

I would like to dedicate this small book to Robert Benne and Carl Braaten who each provided encouragement in recent months as the writing process called me to search, clarify and to choose the higher road of solidarity with both great and ordinary voices of the living Christian tradition we call orthodoxy. Carl Braaten has that cool passion of the Scandinavian whose sermons in seminary were often surprisingly the source of laughter for seminarians who heard in his cultural critique the familiar childhood utterances proclaiming Christ with a new range and depth for children of a new age. Bob Benne's warmth is personal and genuine as the Nebraska winds of spring he knew and shares as a solitary voice of plain, soothing reason among heated ideological rhetoric. I am glad to believe myself one of their numerous students who has heard with them the often quiet but clarion call to mature Christian reflection in the name of the One who bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and who endures all things to the glory of God the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit.