

*Lutheran Introduction to Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, & Gender Expression*. St. Paul: ReconcilingWorks, nd.

An Evaluation and Reaction by Dr. Joel Biermann, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

The stated intent of this brief document [hereafter LISOGIGE] is to “deepen and expand” the “full welcome, inclusion and equity of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual/aromatic (LGBTQIA+) Lutherans in all aspects of the life of their faith community” by providing “a basic introduction to sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.” (pg. 2). The second task, it seems, is ably accomplished in that the twelve pages abound in pithy definitions and pointed directives designed to guide the interested reader into a greater understanding of the complex and constantly evolving world of gender identity and expression. Whether the first goal of deepening and expanding the welcome, inclusion, and equity of said Lutherans into their “faith community” is also accomplished is for others to determine and of no interest to the present consideration. The task of this short paper is to offer a brief evaluation of the document from the standpoint of a Lutheran confession of Christian faith.

Considering the remarkable prominence given the word, *Lutheran* on the cover, it seems clear that the intent of the document is to provide teaching from and for Lutheran Christians. Yet, after the first sentence, *Lutheran* appears only once more (pg. 6), *church* makes a similar fleeting singular appearance (pg. 2) and the word, *Christian* is absent. Most remarkable of all, perhaps, there is no reference or even allusion to Jesus or God anywhere in the document. Of course, one should not quibble about absences and the document makes no claim to theological or doctrinal interests; still to overlook any mention of the Creator in a Lutheran introduction to questions about sex does seem to be a significant omission. And even granting the non-theological purpose of a document aimed at educating the reader to be sensitively aware of the world of ever-expanding gender identities and expressions, beyond the word, *Lutheran*, appearing a total of four times, there is absolutely nothing singularly Lutheran let alone Christian about anything in the document. One could easily replace every use of *Lutheran* with literally *any* other modifier whether religious (from Methodist to Atheist) or secular (from gamers to beekeepers) and the document would require no other modification whatsoever. In other words, this Lutheran document contains absolutely nothing even remotely Lutheran or Christian. It is simply ingratiating information about the latest terms, definitions, and sensitivities required for presumably enlightened and kind people better to welcome those from the rainbow flag communities into their own circles.

Given the absence of any overt theological consideration or even implicit theological foundation in the document, a careful doctrinal reading or critique of LISOGIGE is necessarily unwarranted and, in a sense, inappropriate. Nevertheless, in an effort to help those who might be perplexed or even misled by the document’s effort to label as Lutheran the LGBTQIA+ rhetoric and tutoring that follow the presumptuous title of the document, a few general observations are in order.

The core of Lutheran confession and faith is, of course, the singular action of God on behalf of sinful and fallen creatures in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Human beings—all of them, everywhere and always—are justified, or made right, with their Creator by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone. With this central confession come all the other aspects of Christian faith and life including a complete embrace of all the church's diverse doctrines and practices or the rule of faith. Foundational to everything that Lutheran Christians confess about human beings, then, is the declaration that humans are but creatures who lives contingently and so submissively within the will of God who alone is Creator and Lord. Lutherans confess that God is God and that we are not. God sets the course of the world, establishes the laws that direct it, and determines the unchangeable factors that shape each human life such as place, time, and setting of birth (including all aspects of race, ethnicity, geography, economic opportunity, and nationality), parentage, natural abilities or inabilities, and yes, sex. Contrary to the claim of LISOGIGE, sex is not merely "assigned at birth" in unbending and compliant conformity to a rigid binary system with only two available checkboxes. (pg. 4). Sexual identity is not a human or societal construct. Rather, humans are by God's design and intent either male or female. Notwithstanding the impositions and incursions of the curse of sin into even the process of procreation that can lead to difficult physical and emotional challenges, God's design is that humans are either male or female. God determines this given reality, we do not.

Gender, then, is not something other than sex—though, obviously in the contemporary western world it certainly has become something altogether different. LISOGIGE obligingly follows the "enlightened" and now regnant understanding of the wider culture which asserts a marked difference between sex assigned at birth and gender identity that is "an innate, deeply felt psychological identification as a man, woman, or another gender, which may or may not correspond to the sex assigned to them at birth." (pg. 4). In other words, LISOGIGE declares that my gender is up to me and my feelings. One's identity is determined not by the Creator and Redeemer, but by one's self. A more anti-Christian position is difficult to imagine, yet such thinking is the common thread throughout the document. As the document states flatly: "It is important to remember: all identities are self-identified." (pg. 8). And, quite understandably in the context of self-determination, these identities are far from fixed but readily shift and change over time. It's worth noting that there is nothing in the document to counter the observation that a person's identity of choice might fluctuate as easily as the feelings of any given day—a phenomenon especially characteristic of adolescents navigating the perilous path to self-awareness and adulthood.

Another word noticeably, but unsurprisingly, absent from the document is sin. Presumably, the discovery and celebration of one's individual, self-identified, identity offers no quarter for an idea like sin. The closest LISOGIGE comes to mention of sin is the gentle admonition against "lurid curiosity" since, "Asking people about the details of their bodies [is][sic] not hospitable." (pg. 2). The only other danger that merits an implicit warning is that against inauthenticity since sexual orientation is "honoring a core and authentic part of oneself." (pg. 3). Of course, given this suppression of sin in the document, it is hardly surprising that Jesus makes not even a cameo appearance. With

no sin, what need is there of a savior; and with my identity and self-expression determined by myself who needs, or wants, a Lord?

It is certainly true that each and every human being—including, of course, all those who strongly identify with one or more of the many communities represented by the flags enthusiastically celebrated on the final pages of LISOGIGE—are people uniquely created by God and redeemed by the shed blood of Christ. None are to be dismissed, ignored, ridiculed, or rejected. All matter to Christ and so all must matter to Christ's church. But like all human beings, those in the rainbow flag communities have one overriding need: union with their Creator. This, as all Christians know, can happen only when sinners submissively and repentantly fall at the feet of Jesus and with Thomas declare his Lordship over their lives and receive his gracious forgiveness and adoption as his own sons and daughters. Life lived in a broken world infiltrated at every level with the curse of sin is inevitably a messy and painful affair for every creature who struggles to align his desires, urges, needs, wants, and thoughts with the will of a sovereign God who alone determines what is right, what is just, and what is true. Christian growth is all about living into the reality of grace declared and given and giving concrete expression to God's new creation—a creature conformed not to a personal, deeply felt, self-understanding, but to the image of God's Son, Jesus. An introduction to sexual identity and expression grounded in these timeless truths would be uniquely worthy of the name Lutheran. Sadly, LISOGIGE misses this standard altogether and the only aspect of the document that is remotely Lutheran is the disingenuous appropriation of the name in the title.