

Seduction and Watchfulness

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That nine of Sweden's 14 bishops publicly expressed in *Dagens Nyheter* an opinion on the [Church's] legal authority to perform marriages that differs from the political majority is an encouraging sign that the culture of silence and uniformity is broken within the college of bishops. If more were prepared to speak against what is politically correct, much would be gained.

At the same time, one should not leap for joy at the nine bishops' request to abolish the Church's authority to perform marriages. First, they took no theological position on the underlying issue. Second, the problem for the Church of Sweden would not be solved even if an internal conflict were avoided over whether or not the pastors should marry same-sex pairs. The debate over the marriage issue will come anyway. And the risk of being accused of discrimination remains high because many pastors would not be prepared to hold a service of blessing after a civil "same-sex marriage."

For the Church the issue is much more serious than a question of who is responsible for the legal formalities concerning weddings. For the Church the overriding call should be to proclaim God's will regarding marriage, which is revealed both in the Bible and in nature, and to speak clearly of the consequences of breaking this law.

If the pending proposal for a gender-neutral marriage law is adopted, there will be long-term consequences for all of society. One can assume that no energy will be spared when it comes to rewriting regulations, re-wording textbooks and mass media, etc. The goal of the homosexual lobby has long been to tear down all traditional values so that homosexual relations should appear just as natural as heterosexual. Words have great power over thinking. It suffices to look back 15 or 20 years to see how the acceptance of the homosexual lifestyle has increased. With a new law like this one, there is not only a great risk of expanding the blindness concerning what is natural or unnatural, but also that there will be even greater pressure on youth who are seeking their identity. The consequences of this "normalization" will be enormous. It is a question of a seduction too great to overlook.

Seduction must come, *"but woe to the man by whom seduction comes,"* says Jesus (Matt. 18:7). One who is responsible for proclaiming God's Word assumes a very great liability if he instead distorts it or is silent about the truth so that people are misled, tempted away from salvation and security in Jesus, and end up on the way to being lost. For Jesus, who has redeemed every man with His own blood, this is the most appalling thing one can do. He says: *"But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea."*

Through the Prophet Ezekiel, the Lord says that if one is called to be a watchman for the house of Israel, and thus for Christ's Church, but does not fulfill his calling to warn the ungodly to turn from his way, *"the ungodly shall die because of his misdeeds, but I shall require his blood at your hand. But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity, but you will have saved your life"* (Ezek. 33).

This is a most timely and serious word that applies not least to pastors and bishops. Both in public discourse and in lesser contexts, both God's law and God's gracious forgiveness for Jesus' sake should be mediated so that people in our time can be led on the path to life. A mindset is required that leads one to live with a focus on the Great Day Of Reckoning.

Jesus calls for watchfulness so that one is not deceived. What one listens to determines one's eternity. Just as it is harmful to eat bad food, it is harmful and destructive to listen to false teaching. Therefore it is determinative to test what one hears and to listen only to preaching that is clearly faithful to the Bible's word as to what is sinful and that proclaims that we all need grace, forgiveness and restoration through Jesus.

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