

# Homosexuality and the Calvin College Community

*Guidance for Best Practices  
and Materials for Contextual Study*

*And this is my prayer,  
that your love may overflow more and more  
with knowledge and full insight to help you  
to determine what is best, so that in the day  
of Christ you may be pure and blameless,  
having produced the harvest of righteousness  
that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory  
and praise of God.*

—Philippians 1:9-11 (NRSV)



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In May of 2008, the Calvin College Board of Trustees commissioned a small group—composed of the provost, vice president for student life, faculty representatives, and board members—to guide the college community in examining issues related to homosexuality. At the time, the board mandated the Homosexuality and Community Life (HCL) working group to help the college community attend to the values outlined in the board’s 2008 memo,<sup>1</sup> “further and refine the implementation” of the college’s position on homosexuality throughout the college, and develop materials to guide public communication.

This mandate led to a much deeper exploration of confessional commitments, academic freedom, and college processes, with the result that the HCL group developed three distinct documents, frequently referred to as HCL 1 (*Confessional Commitment and Academic Freedom at Calvin College*), HCL 2 (*Strengthening Procedures Around Confessional Commitment and Academic Freedom at Calvin College*), and the present document. This third document is a response both to the original mandate and to the processes outlined in HCL 2, which in effect expanded the working group’s task significantly.

Thus, the present document is intended not only to offer the requested guidance to faculty and staff, but also to provide a focus for discussion, reflection, and education for the Calvin community. Our intention is to encourage the healthiest, most faithful way of addressing together the many issues related to sexuality as a whole.

The guidelines on Calvin’s position that are contained in the first part of this document were approved by the Board of Trustees on May 19, 2012. The guidelines:

- explain the position of the Christian Reformed Church on homosexuality—or, more precisely, on issues related to same-sex attraction—which is the college’s official position.
- establish ground rules for discussion of homosexuality-related issues on campus in keeping with the college’s commitment to Scripture, the confessions, and academic freedom practiced within that context.
- provide guidelines and recommendations for faculty and staff when encountering these issues in mentoring, teaching, and scholarly roles.

The second section (received for information by the Board of Trustees on May 19, 2012) places our discussions in the context of a wider Christian conversation about homosexuality in order to provide perspective and material for educational purposes.

The document is lengthy because we recognize that in a Christian academic community our vocation includes grappling with complex topic areas. Thus, one important purpose of creating a document such as this is to strengthen our ability as a community to deal with this and other difficult issues. In the development, review, and revision of the document, we have endeavored to model a healthy process—a respectful, thoughtful process of carefully sorting out positions and arguments while being truthful about where the questions and unresolved issues lie.

Because its focus includes academic freedom, this document gives more attention to the con-

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 4.

fessions, theological arguments, and the nature of tolerance than other writings on the subject might. However, pastoral dynamics are never separable from theological arguments, so concern for how these arguments affect people's lives is also present.

The material here draws on a wide range of publications. Given the thousands of books and articles on the subject, the use of sources is selective. Priority has been given to publications by trinitarian, confessionally grounded, Christian believers, and particularly to voices within the Reformed tradition, including those with links to Calvin College.

The document has been through several major revisions. During the summer of 2011, fifty-two people representing the college and the Christian Reformed Church graciously read and discussed an earlier draft. The HCL working group would like to express our deep gratitude for the time and thought these people contributed. Their participation modeled the best kind of Christian communal discernment, and their many wise suggestions have resulted in a much better document. We also thank the many Calvin faculty and staff who participated in discussions around this document in January and February 2012.

Finally, while the document is imperfect in many ways, we dare to dream that engaging this material will be a capacity-building exercise for faculty, staff, constituents, and students, affirming our commitments to Scripture, the confessions, and to Christian discipleship. We dare to hope that engaging this material will help us become more acutely aware of our need for God's grace, and of the beauty and power of the Gospel.

—Homosexuality and Community Life Working Group, May 2012

## HOMOSEXUALITY AND COMMUNITY LIFE WORKING GROUP

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The HCL working group began meeting in the fall of 2008. It is an ad hoc group made up of board members, faculty, and staff representing a variety of disciplines and expertise. At the completion of our work, the HCL working group comprised:

Claudia Beversluis, Provost (co-chair)

Shirley Hoogstra, Vice President for Student Life (co-chair)

Randy Engle, Board of Trustees

David Diephouse, History

Loren Haarsma, Physics and Astronomy

David Hoekema, Philosophy

Dan Vandersteen, Broene Counseling Center

Glenn Weaver, Psychology

Julia Smith, Student Life (recorder)

The following people have also been valued members of the working group at various stages:

Ron Baylor, Board of Trustees

Randy Bytwerk, Communication Arts and Sciences

Simona Goi, Political Science, Gender Studies

Debra Rienstra, English

John Witvliet, Music, Congregational and Ministry Studies, Calvin Institute for Christian Worship

# **Guidelines on Calvin's Position**

*Approved by the Board of Trustees  
May 19, 2012*





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## GUIDELINES ON CALVIN'S POSITION

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### **Setting the Stage for Healthy, Faithful Discussion**

*The following observations address several underlying dynamics connected to the topic of homosexuality and establish ground rules for continued discernment characterized by integrity and charity.*

#### **A. Dealing with a Divisive, Emotional Issue**

Discussions of homosexuality<sup>2</sup> in the Christian community are charged with particularly strong passions. Conflicts on related issues have torn apart families, congregations, denominations, and worldwide communions of Christian believers. People on all sides have experienced profound pain. Many who uphold the church's traditional view are deeply concerned about the erosion of biblical authority and about a culture where people "do what is right in their own eyes." At the same time, many who call for change see the matter as resembling the church's refusal to deal with the injustices of slavery and the subordination of women—injustices that once were tolerated or even promoted in the name of biblical authority. The rhetoric from some parties can reach a fevered pitch.

Addressing homosexuality is also difficult because different groups tend to use moral reasoning and rhetorical forms that offend other groups. Those who argue for change in the church's historic position often highlight personal narratives, emphasizing the distance between the culture of biblical times and our own. Those who defend the church's historic position tend to rely upon traditional interpretations of scriptural texts and emphasize the way that scriptural ethical norms transcend historical and cultural differences. The arguments seem to pit an emphasis on obedience against an emphasis on compassion—an impossible dilemma. Neither form of argumentation speaks to criteria that are typically viewed as convincing to the other side. Further, there are only a few places in the broader Christian community where people are actually talking with those who disagree with them, and conversations elsewhere rarely attend to the differing criteria by which various claims are judged.

Communal reflection and discernment are further curtailed by the fact that positions on same-sex behavior or marriage or ordination of "practicing" clergy have become a source of identity for congregations, schools, and non-profit organizations. Christian academic institutions that once

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 1 for a note on the use of language.

found their distinctiveness primarily through the way they approached issues of creation and evolution, or some other issues, are now “branded” in terms of their stance on this issue. Such institutions may embrace a range of views about the possibility of a just war or any number of other topics, but not tolerate differing views about same-sex sexual behavior. In some Christian communities, one is ostracized for even suggesting that the issue should be discussed; in others, one is ostracized for suggesting that the church’s traditional view has merit.

For Calvin College, the tendency of some to connect a position on homosexuality with institutional identity already has had—and will continue to have—implications for admissions, development, grant funding, and faculty recruitment. These are hardly the only issues before us, but they will continue to be significant ones, probably for some time. Institutional decisions in *any* direction will attract some students, faculty members, staff, and donors, and repel others.

Further complicating the conversations in Christian circles is our pluralistic context. As of February 2012, same-sex marriage is legal in six states, and same-sex unions are legally recognized in approximately thirty countries worldwide. Vast diversity of opinions and assumed premises within North American culture as well as in international cultures are compounded by diversity of experience among individuals. Our students come to campus deeply influenced by popular, secular culture, and by the values of their generation. They bring widely different convictions and experiences, and some of them are confused about what they believe regarding sexuality. Those of us who work here may or may not have strong convictions or carefully weighed opinions. Meanwhile, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons—and some others who are questioning their sexuality—live and work on campus, some of them “out” but others not. In other words, our campus is already a diverse place, probably more than we know. While we strive to be a welcoming community, we must not be naïve about how difficult it is, especially for those outside the heterosexual majority, to reveal their sexuality and sexual struggles.

Finally, our honest reflection is often hindered because many people simply do not want to talk about same-sex anything. Some do not have patience for complexity around the topic. This means that too often, discussions are reactive or merely anecdotal, drawing upon the weaker moral, exegetical, and theological arguments available. Part of the reason for this is that the best theological arguments have been difficult to find in the avalanche of writings on sexual issues over the last decade. Of course, another important motivation for avoidance is a natural desire to shy away from tension and ambiguity.

## **B. Avoidance Versus Formation**

However, avoidance is not an option. We will continue to face issues related to homosexuality; no conclusive “answer” or official stance will remain unchallenged in our broader culture. So our task is to engage this area of human life with courage, humility, and faithfulness. Because of Calvin’s status as an academic community, our particular vocation is to contribute to the wider conversation with all the resources of our disciplines, our habits of careful analysis, and our structured processes for testing ideas and arguments. The aim of this document, as stated in the 2008 mandate from the Board of Trustees, is to “further and refine the implementation of Calvin’s position throughout the college, specifically its implications for teaching, advising, writing, counseling students, and college programming,” and to provide some useful mapping of common ground and issues in confessional interpretation, so that we can continue to fulfill our academic vocation to the best of our ability.

One powerful way we can serve our students, our disciplines, and indeed the church is to

model constructive, charitable discussion. Enmity and rancor over sexuality have been poisonous to Christian witness.<sup>3</sup> We must challenge one another to model humility, generosity, and graciousness in our teaching, scholarship, and interaction with students, one another, and constituents. Moreover, we must resist the tendency to dwell in a realm of abstractions, and instead must model “incarnational presence with those for whom [same-sex attraction] is personal.”<sup>4</sup> We must find ways to uphold and embrace both obedience and compassion.

If we are able to do these things, we will find that the conversation itself is spiritually formational. The Holy Spirit will work in our hearts and in our common life through our faithful engagement with these issues. As difficult as it is to live with disagreements and ambiguities, this difficulty is an opportunity for growth as we strive both to learn and to model Christlike love and truth-telling.

### C. Modeling High-Trust Processes

Within the Calvin community, this should be the kind of discussion that keeps us learning together about how the Bible and the confessions relate to any number of key issues. We can strive to work together to discern the merits of various convictions and practices, thus minimizing the pressure to make issue-related judgments in the more highly charged and ad hominem context of particular academic freedom cases.

Engaging faithfully in this discussion requires us to be especially vigilant in observing both the letter and the spirit of the high-trust processes outlined in the *Handbook for Teaching Faculty*. These processes are relatively new,<sup>5</sup> and we are likely to discover situations where a way forward is not specifically spelled out. Especially on these occasions, practicing a transparent, trust-building process of inquiry designed for mutual learning is a high priority. We need to hold ourselves and one another accountable in our commitment to these principles.

In the midst of difficult discussions, we often find ourselves weighing competing but deeply held convictions, including competing Reformed convictions. One important tenet in establishing a faithful, high-trust setting is to begin with the presumption that people have differing views because they are weighing convictions differently. Beginning with the presumption of good faith will allow us to perceive and understand those underlying values and convictions that we might otherwise overlook.

In practice, the college and its constituency will not always be able to live up to their ideals. Therefore, to avoid potential impediments to good-faith discussion:

- Members of the Board of Trustees, Calvin parents, students, donors, and all others in the community should be assured that our faculty will not dismiss scriptural authority and confessional commitments as unimportant, or dismiss chastity as a minor concern. Our constituents should be assured that Calvin faculty will promote actions that “arise out of true faith, conform to God’s law, and are done for his glory” and not those that are “based on what we think is right or on established human tradition” (Heidelberg Catechism 91)—even while we discern how best to obey God’s law and to follow Christ.

<sup>3</sup> This is supported by Barna Group research. For a summary of research findings, see chapter 5 in David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity... and Why It Matters* (Baker, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Wendy Gritter, “Helpful Postures in Navigating Conversations on Faith and Sexuality,” presentation at Calvin College, February 8, 2011. Wendy Gritter is director of New Direction Ministries in Toronto. The idea of the conversation itself as spiritually formational is also from Gritter’s presentation.

<sup>5</sup> The recommendations of HCL 2 for governance procedures around confessional commitment and academic freedom were incorporated into the faculty handbook following approval by the board in May 2010.

- Conversely, members of the faculty and professional staff<sup>6</sup> should be assured that our colleagues and administrators will defend us against those who make uninformed and hasty judgments about our work, and will promote respect for our responsibility as Christian academics to continually reflect on difficult aspects of this and other topics, enabled by the resources of our disciplines as well as by our faith commitments.
- Moreover, all members of the community should be expected to speak prophetically against acts, words, or attitudes that—in the words of the Heidelberg Catechism—“belittle, insult, hate, or kill my neighbor.” (Heidelberg Catechism 105).

None of this is easy. The tasks ahead require patient, intentional, collaborative, prayerful work together. Sexual issues of all kinds challenge us to exercise the deepest strengths of our own strong Christian academic tradition. Indeed, this is an area in which Christian institutions should be taking the lead in modeling a constructive approach.

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<sup>6</sup> The term *professional staff* in this document refers to those staff members with faculty status, who sign the Form of Subscription.

## Common Ground and the CRC Position

*This section affirms the confessional commitments we share and explains the CRC position on same-sex attraction and behavior.*

As Calvin College faculty members and professional staff, we commit to approaching every issue from a wide and deep pool of common scriptural convictions. These centering or grounding convictions render invalid for our use many categories of arguments that one hears in the public square on both the political Right and Left. At the same time, these convictions provide common touchpoints that affirm our agreements even as we seek to reflect on more contested matters.

When faculty members, board members, and professional staff subscribe to the confessions, we agree to do the following:

*We honor the authority and sufficiency of Scripture.*

We receive “all these books and these only as holy and canonical, for the regulating, founding, and establishing of our faith” (BC 5).<sup>7</sup> We may not consider “human writings—no matter how holy their authors may have been—equal to the divine writings; nor may we put custom, nor the majority, nor age, nor the passage of time or persons, nor councils, decrees, or official decisions above the truth of God, for truth is above everything else” (BC 7).

*We affirm that we know God through both creation and Scripture.*

“We know [God] by two means: . . . by the creation, preservation and government of the universe” and “by his holy and divine Word” (BC 2).

*We celebrate God's creation of humanity in the divine likeness.*

We affirm that God created humanity “from the dust of the earth” and made and formed humans “in God's image and likeness” (BC 14).

*We lament the pernicious and pervasive effects of the Fall.*

“Who can glory in their own will when they understand that ‘the mind of the flesh is enmity against God’? Who can speak of their own knowledge in view of the fact that ‘the natural man does not understand the things of the Spirit of God’? . . . For there is no understanding nor will conforming to God's understanding and will apart from Christ's involvement, as he teaches us when he says, ‘Without me you can do nothing’” (BC 14). And as the Heidelberg Catechism invites us to confess, “I have a natural tendency to hate God and my neighbor” (HC 5).

*We celebrate forgiveness through grace, and righteousness in Christ alone.*

“God, because of Christ's atonement, will never hold against me any of my sins nor my sinful nature which I need to struggle against all my life” (HC 56). “But Jesus Christ is our righteousness in making available to us all his merits and all the holy works he has done for us and in our place. And faith is the instrument that keeps us in communion with him and with all his benefits” (BC 22).

*We affirm that good human actions are made possible only by the renewing work of the Holy Spirit.*

What we do that is good is “[o]nly that which arises out of true faith, conforms to God's law, and is done for his glory” and not that which is “based on what we think is right or on established human tradition” (HC 91).

<sup>7</sup> In this and subsequent sections, the parenthetical abbreviation *BC* refers to the Belgic Confession, and *HC* refers to the Heidelberg Catechism.

*We affirm the significance of God’s law and the example of the life and witness of Christ for shaping human obedience.*

“We believe that the ceremonies and symbols of the law have ended with the coming of Christ, and that all foreshadowings have come to an end, so that the use of them ought to be abolished among Christians. Yet the truth and substance of these things remain for us in Jesus Christ, in whom they have been fulfilled. Nevertheless, we continue to use the witnesses drawn from the law and prophets to confirm us in the gospel and to regulate our lives with full integrity for the glory of God, according to his will” (BC 25).

*We affirm and practice the obligations of church members to one another.*

“[A]ll people are obliged to join and unite with [the church], keeping the unity of the church by submitting to its instruction and discipline ... and by serving to build up one another, according to the gifts God has given them as members of each other in the same body” (BC 28).

*We pursue righteousness wholeheartedly.*

“[W]ith all my heart I should always hate sin and take pleasure in whatever is right” (HC 113).

*We love our neighbors.*

“I am not to belittle, insult, hate, or kill my neighbor—not by my thoughts, my words, my look or gesture, and certainly not by actual deeds—and I am not to be party to this in others” (HC 105). “By condemning envy, hatred, and anger God tells us to love our neighbors as ourselves, to be patient, peace-loving, gentle, merciful, and friendly to them, to protect them from harm as much as we can, and to do good even to our enemies” (HC 107).

*We affirm chastity.*

“God condemns all unchastity. We should therefore thoroughly detest it and, married or single, live decent and chaste lives” (HC 108). “We are temples of the Holy Spirit, body and soul, and God wants both to be kept clean and holy. That is why he forbids everything which incites unchastity, whether it be actions, looks, talk, thoughts, or desires” (HC 109).<sup>8</sup>

*We desire, work toward, and point to signs of the fulfillment of the kingdom of God, as we are enabled by the Holy Spirit.*

When we pray “your kingdom come,” we pray, “rule us by your Word and Spirit in such a way that more and more we submit to you.” We pray that God will keep the church strong and destroy the devil’s work, “until your kingdom is so complete and perfect that in it you are all in all” (HC 123).

In committing ourselves to the Gospel of Jesus and these common convictions, we approach all matters of sexuality from a different set of assumptions. For instance, we resist ideas that people commonly hold, sometimes subconsciously, such as these:

- Sexuality is not relevant to holiness.
- Sexuality is primarily about self-fulfillment.

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<sup>8</sup> In his commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism, Zacharias Ursinus, co-author of the catechism, provides examples of unchaste behavior that is condemned by God. The first example he cites is homosexual practice. *The Commentary by Dr. Zacharius Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism* (Eerdmans, 1956), 591. Original text: Ursinus, *Explicationum Catecheticarum* (Cantabregiae, 1587), 803.

- Sexual expression within any committed relationship is necessarily moral.
- Celibacy<sup>9</sup> is unnatural or nearly impossible.
- Any group (whether same-sex attracted or heterosexual, married or single) approaches this topic from a position of inherent moral superiority, apart from Scripture and the church, which works to interpret Scripture faithfully.
- This is a morally neutral topic.

Instead, members of the Calvin community can be expected to affirm that:

- The image of God is in all people, including same-sex-attracted people.
- Sexuality is a good gift and a significant aspect of human nature.
- All sexuality is affected by sin.
- Forgiveness is through grace.
- All Christians are called to holiness in all sexual matters.
- The work of the Spirit renews us as individuals and communities.

Acknowledging our common confessional commitments should help sustain the atmosphere of trust and mutual respect that is necessary for engaging in any discussion about a difficult issue. As already mentioned, we should always begin with the presumption of good faith, seeking to perceive how tensions might be arising from competing ways of honoring our scriptural convictions and confessional commitments.

#### **A. Calvin College and the CRC Position**

Since Calvin College is owned and operated by the Christian Reformed Church, the Board of Trustees has affirmed that the CRC synodical position on homosexuality is—to use the technical term—*settled and binding* for the college with respect to policies concerning employees' sexual conduct, hiring, residence hall rules, student life programming, and any official statement on the topic.

Calvin College's standards for sexual conduct of faculty and staff are in line with the CRC's position. They proscribe sexual relations outside of marriage, understood to be between a man and a woman.

The faculty handbook (section 6.5.6) provides:

Though it is the college's policy to assure equal opportunity in its hiring, personnel practices, and admissions without regard to marital status or sexual orientation, sexual relations outside of marriage are proscribed (see, e.g., *Handbook for Teaching Faculty*, section 6.1.2). Marriage is understood by the college and the Christian Reformed Church, with which it is affiliated, to be a covenantal union between a man and a woman.

The staff handbook's code of conduct provides:

Staff members are subject to discharge for misconduct that includes but is not limited to such offenses that appear to have caused, or appear likely to cause, serious and lasting harm to another person or the college. Among the offenses that may fall into this category are: fraud; theft; insubordination; dishonesty; unacceptable job performance; unauthorized release of confidential college data or information; professional misconduct; abuse

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<sup>9</sup> This document uses the term *celibacy* to refer to sexual abstinence. Celibacy may or may not be viewed as a calling or confirmed with a vow.



of a spouse, child, or student; sexual misconduct, including sexual relations outside marriage; abuse or derogation on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, or other violation of the policy on discrimination and harassment; immoderate anger, slander, or verbal abuse; abuse of alcohol or other drugs; persistent use of profane or obscene language; and intentional destruction of the college's property or another staff member's property.

Section 6.1.2 of the faculty handbook contains a provision similar to this section of the staff handbook.

## B. Understanding the CRC Position

The CRC position is established in two main documents: the *Acts of Synod 1973* (609-633) and the *Agenda for Synod 2002* (313-351). In addition, the CRC published in 1999 a brief pamphlet titled "Homosexuality and the Church: A Summary of Two Synodical Reports of the Christian Reformed Church." Though many Christian Reformed theologians, pastors, and other members have written about homosexuality,<sup>10</sup> any citation of "the CRC position" ultimately refers to the two official synodical documents. (See bibliography for publication information.)

In sum, the synodical documents affirm the following:

- Heterosexuality is the created norm.
- Homosexual orientation is an aspect of the fallen creation.
- Homosexual persons are not culpable for their orientation, but are responsible—as are all people—for their actions. (The CRC position distinguishes orientation from behavior.)
- Chastity is the biblical pattern for ordering the sexual dimension of our lives. Chastity entails sexual relations only within a marriage relationship between a man and a woman.
- Sexual abstinence is the biblically prescribed course of conduct for homosexual persons.
- God offers mercy, grace, forgiveness, and sanctification to heterosexual and homosexual Christians in all aspects of their lives, including their sexuality.
- The church is called to accept, love, and encourage homosexual persons as part of the Christian community, supporting them (along with all church members) in practicing holiness in all of life, including the sexual aspect.

## C. Scriptural Basis

Because the CRC is committed, as the confessions stipulate, to the authority and sufficiency of Scripture in all matters of faith and life, the CRC position is based in extensive study of Scripture. The following section very briefly outlines the synodical documents' understanding of certain key passages. (Quotations here, for the sake of brevity and readability, are taken from the summary pamphlet "Homosexuality and the Church: A Summary of Two Synodical Reports of the Christian Reformed Church," authored by Louis Tamminga, now out of print.)

Genesis 1:26-28 and 2:18-24

The creation stories establish heterosexuality as God's intention for human life. The male and female complementarity is meant not only for reproduction but also for "companionship and wholeness." However, the Genesis account of the Fall also tells us that "[s]in

<sup>10</sup> For resources on the wider scriptural context for the CRC position, see the "Position 3" section in the bibliography.



brought disharmony, disorder, and brokenness into every area of life. Homosexuality is one of many such consequences of the invasion of sin into creation.” In fact, all human sexuality is affected by sin. While humankind is responsible collectively for sin, we are individually responsible for the choices we make.

#### Genesis 19:4-11

The story of Sodom is acknowledged as not necessarily about homosexuality but about “sexual assault and violence”—evidence of the overall depravity of Sodom. “The evil of the Sodomites was much more general than sexual depravity; theirs was a corruption and degeneracy that pervaded all of life.”

#### Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13

The synodical documents acknowledge that Levitical passages cannot be assumed automatically to be binding on us today. However, the passages concerning sexual relations between males “appear in the context of laws regulating moral precepts in marriage and family. They forbid indecency, incest, and adultery.”

#### 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

This is one of two passages containing lists of sins that include same-sex practices. Paul's emphasis in this passage is on those who used to practice such things but are now forgiven and included in the fellowship of believers.

#### Romans 1:21-27

In this passage, same-sex sexual practices are described as unnatural and listed among several sins that follow, Paul explains, from idolatry. “Exchanging the natural use of sex for the unnatural, Paul implies, is a result of humankind's straying away from God.” The synodical documents consider the possibility that the Pauline passages may have “intended to warn against pagan cultic practices.” However, “in both cases the context is clearly also one of ethical instruction. We can only conclude that the New Testament passages that refer to homosexual behavior are in harmony with the judgment of the Old Testament: homosexual acts are sinful, whether or not they are practiced in a cultic context.”

The synodical documents also consider the broader currents of Scripture on sexuality, marriage, and holiness, returning to the principle of creation order: “Homosexuality, then, is not a variation in nature such as hair coloring or left-handedness. Maleness and femaleness are part of the creation order. Jesus affirmed this emphatically (Matthew 5:31, 48; 19:5-9; Mark 10:6-8), and so did Paul (1 Corinthians 6:13-20; 7:1-7; Ephesians 5:22-23).”

The conclusion: “[F]or the homosexual neighbor, remaining single and chaste is the biblically prescribed course of conduct.”

### **D. Pastoral Implications**

The 1999 synodical document,<sup>11</sup> along with the summary pamphlet, was commissioned in direct response to a perceived lack of engagement in the churches with the issues raised in the 1973 document and, frankly, to a widespread failure to provide pastoral care to same-sex-attracted people within the CRC. It's fair to say that in the thirteen years since the 1999 document, concerns

<sup>11</sup> This document, with some changes, was accepted by Synod in 2002.

about pastoral implications have only intensified. Some of the main pastoral topics addressed in the documents are summarized here.

*The need for repentance in the church*

The CRC (along with many other churches) must repent of past and present unchristian actions toward same-sex-attracted people. These include not only hatred, fear, shaming, and rejection of these people, but also ignoring homosexuality-related issues, remaining silent, and failing to include and care for members who experience same-sex attraction.

*Affirmation of singleness*

While marriage is celebrated and supported in the Christian community, singleness is also a valid Christian choice. In fact, in some New Testament passages, singleness is preferred over marriage for Christians. As the summary pamphlet observes, “This means that abstinence from sexual relations can be a feature of a dedicated Christian life. In Christ, the companionship provided by the redeemed community offers the unmarried—heterosexual and homosexual alike—an alternative to marriage. One of the purposes of sex, that of achieving personal wholeness, can be realized in a significant sense in Christ.”

*Accountability in community*

The church affirms that self-control is a gift of the Holy Spirit and that all Christians, married or single, are called to sexual restraint. A healthy church community will provide both accountability and support for all people—including same-sex-attracted people—in practicing sexual holiness.

*Christ as the source of identity*

In resistance to other ways in which our cultures urge us to define ourselves—including marital or parental status, social class, profession, race, and sexual orientation—we are called to find our identity above all in Christ. This does not mean keeping parts of ourselves secret; rather, it means letting our identity as Christ’s redeemed transcend all other dimensions of ourselves and our lives.

*The need for honesty and acceptance*

For generations, non-heterosexual people have either suffered in secret or left the church. The CRC pastoral documents urge churches to create a place in which same-sex-attracted people can be truthful about who they are and can remain within the community.

While the synodical documents recognize urgent needs and set out goals toward which the congregations and denominational structures must aim, there is general agreement that the CRC has a long way to go in living out healthy pastoral-care practices for same-sex-attracted people.

## **E. Commitment to Holiness**

Perhaps the most common objection to the CRC’s position is that it denies people who persistently experience same-sex attraction any way to express their sexuality. Heterosexual people have the option of marriage; people who experience same-sex attraction must remain celibate. Some people object that this hardly seems fair or just or compassionate, especially in cultures where sexual fulfillment is so stridently championed.

In response to this objection, those who affirm the CRC position point out that obedience is more important than “personal fulfillment” for all Christians in all areas of life. Heterosexual people must also resist sexual temptations outside of the marriage relationship—not a simple or

easy matter. Heterosexual people who would like to be married sometimes cannot be, and thus remain single and celibate. Moreover, we do not muster up the strength for obedience on our own, but through the Spirit's strength and in the context (ideally) of the Christian community.

Wesley Hill, a theologian and doctoral candidate who identifies as a gay man, writes movingly about his struggle to remain celibate despite the difficulty and loneliness.<sup>12</sup> Quoting Richard Hays, Hill connects his daily struggle to a larger theology of suffering and obedience in the Christian life:

Coping with loneliness as a homosexual Christian requires a profound theology of brokenness, I think. Alluding to Romans 8:23 (“We ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies”), Richard Hays sketches the outline of what such a theology might look like: homosexual Christians who battle constant loneliness are “summoned to a difficult, costly obedience, while ‘groaning’ for the ‘redemption of our bodies’ (Romans 8:23). Anyone who does not recognize this as a description of authentic Christian existence has never struggled seriously with the imperatives of the gospel, which challenge and frustrate our ‘natural’ impulses in countless ways.” I have come to realize my need to take the New Testament witness seriously that groaning and grief and feeling broken are legitimate ways for me to express my cross-bearing discipleship to Jesus. It’s not as if groaning means I am somehow doing something wrong. Groaning is a sign of my fidelity. (118-119)

The Bible calls the Christian struggle against sin *faith* (Hebrews 12:3-4; 10:37-39). It calls the Christian fight against impure cravings *holiness* (Romans 6:12-13, 22). So I am trying to appropriate these biblical descriptions for myself. I am learning to look at my daily wrestling with disordered desires and call it *trust*. I am learning to look at my battle to keep from giving in to my temptations and call it *sanctification*. I am learning to see that my flawed, imperfect, yet never-giving-up faithfulness is precisely the spiritual fruit that God will praise me for on the last day, to the ultimate honor of Jesus Christ. (146)

As the Materials for Contextual Discussion describe, faithful Christians disagree on numerous issues related to biblical exegesis, sexual identity, and ethics. Our discussions on this campus will and should continue, so we need to understand both the CRC's position and the many nuances and disagreements surrounding the topic. However, we can be encouraged by the many convictions that members of the Calvin community share and that faculty, board members, and professional staff commit to upholding in our common work.

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<sup>12</sup> Wesley Hill, *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality* (Zondervan, 2010).

## Guidance and Best Practices

*This section is an effort to summarize what the college's position and policies mean for community life, teaching, and scholarship at Calvin at this time.*

In order to consider both recommended approaches and boundary questions concerning homosexuality, it is necessary to acknowledge that Calvin faculty and staff function in several roles, sometimes separately and sometimes simultaneously. We organize this section, therefore, into five categories: pastoral care, indirect encounters with the topic, direct encounters with the topic, exploration through scholarship, and the convergence of public and private life.

### A. Pastoral Care

Faculty and staff frequently find themselves in a pastoral care role with students and with one another. For some—such as our college chaplains, counseling center staff, student life program staff, and residence life staff—this is a primary role. For faculty and others, this may be a secondary role, expressed especially in advising and mentoring contexts.

In keeping with the CRC's recent emphasis on pastoral care for people struggling with same-sex attraction and other related issues, and in keeping with the emphasis on pastoral concerns in the board's 2008 memo, college faculty and staff are encouraged to fulfill their pastoral role with students and one another based on the following principles.

1. Remind each other of these fundamental truths:
  - We are all made in the image of God.
  - We are loved by God.
  - We are all sinners, but God offers forgiveness in Christ.
  - Sexual sins are not unforgivable, nor are they more disastrous than many other sins.
  - We are all called to holiness, including in our sexual lives.
  - Faithfulness and obedience are possible through the Spirit.
  - It is possible to be a Christian and be same-sex-attracted.

When engaging students in a mentoring relationship or in a pastoral mode, it is important to remember that students may understand themselves to be gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or questioning their sexuality—or they may have a friend or family member who does. In these situations, it is crucial to listen to and support the students, encouraging them to grow in relationship to God and others, and to pursue honest self-understanding.

In the process of developing this document, our student life staff often reported that students struggling with same-sex attraction (or with sexual issues of all kinds) do not necessarily take the above principles as a given. Many of them have suffered rejection and judgment from other Christians. In this context, we are enjoined by our governing bodies to make this campus a place of safety, healing, and encouragement.

2. Be honest about the college's policy commitments.
 

Discussions at Calvin will include the various streams of thought, both Christian and secular, about gay marriage and sexual intimacy between people who are same-sex at-

tracted. In those discussions, the best advice is to explain with confidence why Calvin has privileged the historic Christian view on abstinence for single people regardless of sexual orientation, understanding that marriage is between a man and a woman. A balanced discussion reflects care and respect for Calvin College. Divisional vice presidents are encouraged to continue providing professional development on this or other topics that would help employees speak well about the college's position or commitments.

When faculty and staff are asked the pointed question, "What do *you* think?," the best advice is to take stock of the quality of the relationship with the questioner. Is the questioner looking for a way to bypass his or her own study and reflection on the topic? ("I'll just believe what you believe.") Or is the relationship deep enough to warrant a fuller answer? Two cautions are needed: For faculty and staff, the goal is to be available to students to discuss controversial and non-controversial topics of interest. Since our students have a range of views on this and other topics, to be identified too quickly with one point of view may result in being seen as less approachable by students with an opposing view. The second caution is to remember our significant influence as teachers and mentors. To that end, challenging students to come to their own conclusions is wise. On this topic we should not be strident, even if we disagree with a point of view.

Outside evaluators often note with admiration the enthusiastic unity of both faculty and staff around the mission of the college. This identification with the college mission comes from a sense of personal integrity and loyalty to the community in which we have chosen to work. It is expected that on the topic of homosexuality, college personnel will continue to operate out of respect and love for the college.<sup>13</sup>

A last point on the delicate yet privileged nature of the mentoring relationship should be noted and respected. Confidentiality should be strictly kept by mentors in regard to their mentees. However, mentees are not held to confidentiality regarding the comments or opinions of their mentors. Thus, in relation to controversial topics, mentors should not say things in private—explicitly or implicitly—that they would not be willing to defend in public as being consistent with their commitments to the college.

Recognizing competing "goods" is part and parcel of life. Students can learn a great deal from the way we handle controversial topics with integrity and honesty, honoring our commitments to communal values while still listening, caring, and being open to difficult and unresolved questions.

The theme of all three HCL documents has been high-trust consultation and collaboration. When in doubt, faculty and staff are well advised to speak to their supervisors, departmental chairs, deans, or vice presidents to confer together on the best way forward. Rarely is time so short that a collegial seeking of advice could not be accomplished. We are a community of people who care about one another. It is in community that we work out important and often disputable matters.

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<sup>13</sup> The introduction to the staff handbook states: "The mission of Calvin College forms the foundation for our working community, and the success of the college in living out this mission is related directly to the competence, performance, and conduct of its staff members. Calvin College asks each staff member to participate in this community by being accountable to and responsible for each other. An essential element of our responsibility to the community and to one another is to strive always to 'lead a life worthy of God, who has called you into his own kingdom and glory' (I Thessalonians 2:12)." The faculty handbook deals with commitment to the mission of the college in section 3.6.1.

### 3. Guide students to make adult decisions.

The college's mission is to educate and prepare students to do God's work in God's world. That means that our goal, even in pastoral and advising modes, is to respect students as adults who must sort through difficult issues for themselves. We offer knowledge, guidance, advice, and formational practices; we hold students accountable to the community's rules while they are here; we encourage them to be accountable to their own spiritual growth and to their broader commitments and Christian convictions. But we also recognize that they will make their own decisions.

Of course, we can all encourage students and one another to make use of other campus resources available to us, both through the academic and student life divisions.

One way to approach these issues with students is to help them consider the difference between sexual attraction, orientation, and identity. For instance, Christian psychologist Mark Yarhouse makes a "three-tier distinction" between same-sex attraction, homosexual orientation, and gay identity. In exploring the intersection of religious and sexual identity, he proposes deconstructing the common "gay script" that conflates attractions with identity. By pausing to reflect on the strength, persistence, and meaning of their attractions over time, same-sex-attracted persons may or may not go on to think of those attractions in terms of an enduring orientation. Yarhouse also notes that understanding oneself to have a homosexual orientation does not automatically assume the self-defining attribution of a gay identity. The choice to call oneself gay or not is a complex one, involving one's religious, social, and moral values, and the accepted norms of one's social group. None of the three tiers in this model necessitates sexual activity. At any stage, a person who is same-sex attracted, who has a homosexual orientation, or who identifies as gay, may be choosing the path of sexual abstinence out of religious or other convictions.

Another useful distinction is made between two approaches to achieving congruence around sexual attraction and behavior. The American Psychological Association refers to this distinction—between telic and organismic congruence—in its 2009 *Report of the Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Response to Sexual Orientation*.<sup>14</sup> The report states:

The conflict between psychology and traditional faiths may have its roots in different philosophical viewpoints. Some religions give priority to telic congruence (i.e., living consistently within one's valuative goals) (W. Hathaway, personal communication, June 30, 2008; cf. Richards & Bergin, 2005). Some authors propose that for adherents of these religions, religious perspectives and values should be integrated into the goals of psychotherapy (Richards & Bergin, 2005; Throckmorton & Yarhouse, 2006). Affirmative and multicultural models of LGB psychology give priority to organismic congruence (i.e., living with a sense of wholeness in one's experiential self) (W. Hathaway, personal communication, June 30, 2008; cf. Gonsiorek, 2004; Malyon, 1982). This perspective gives priority to the unfolding of developmental processes, including self-awareness and personal identity.

This difference in worldviews can impact psychotherapy. For instance, individuals who have strong religious beliefs can experience tensions and conflicts between their ideal self and beliefs and their sexual and affectional needs and desires (Beckstead & Morrow, 2004; D. F. Morrow, 2003). The different worldviews would approach psychotherapy for these individuals from dissimilar perspectives: The telic strategy would prioritize values (Rosik, 2003; Yarhouse

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<sup>14</sup> APA Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation. (2009). *Report of the Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. 18.



& Burkett, 2002), whereas the organismic approach would give priority to the development of self-awareness and identity (Beckstead & Israel, 2007; Gonsiorek, 2004; Haldeman, 2004). It is important to note that the organismic worldview can be congruent with and respectful of religion (Beckstead & Israel, 2007; Glassgold, 2008; Gonsiorek, 2004; Haldeman, 2004; Mark, 2008), and the telic worldview can be aware of sexual stigma and respectful of sexual orientation (Throckmorton & Yarhouse, 2006; Tan, 2008; Yarhouse, 2008).

As an example of how the student life division is practicing the principles discussed in this section, we offer this guidance for programming connected to sexuality.

In all the ways in which the student life division interacts with students around human sexuality, the goal is to help students explore how to live faithfully and responsibly as image-bearers of God who are also sexual beings. As the Sexuality Series vision and mission statements affirm:

We aim to provide biblically faithful, wise, and honest counsel to Calvin students in the areas of sexuality, gender, and relationships, so that a growing understanding of these topics may contribute to students' flourishing and bring praise to God.

The approach of student life in these matters should be based on Scripture as the authoritative word of God, and in keeping with the specific commitments of the Christian Reformed Church. We seek to discern the findings of science, the experience of believers, and the cultures we encounter within this framework.

We also acknowledge that every topic presents an opportunity for individual and communal learning.

In affirmation of the principles expressed in *Strengthening Procedures Around Confessional Commitment and Academic Freedom at Calvin College* (HCL 2), our standard mode of operation should be with high-trust communication patterns that presume good motives and integrity on the part of all parties. We should be willing and ready to engage in challenging conversations constructively, aiming to model ways to engage in difficult conversations well. We should not avoid disagreement, since an unhealthy fear of disagreement can be as destructive as a low-trust environment, and the two are often mutually reinforcing. We also should work actively to prevent unnecessary or harmful conflict.

## **B. Teaching/Scholarship: Indirect Encounters with Homosexuality-Related Issues**

For faculty, some encounters with homosexuality-related issues are a matter of professional course, and the context does not call for extensive treatment of the college's position or extensive theological analysis because the main focus is on something else. In such situations, faculty must seek a wise approach based on a sense of context: What is the main focus of our study? What are the main faith-integration components of the topic? What does this group of students need for their discernment at this point?

It is possible, in other words, for homosexuality to come up in contexts where the lesson is focused on other issues and not on sexual ethics per se. While a mention of the college's position might be fitting, a lengthy discussion or policy review could also be an unnecessary or even inappropriate digression in these situations. For example, a professor might do the following:

- introduce literary theory students to "queer theory" as one among many post-structuralist approaches to literary studies. The emphasis is on understanding the concerns of this approach and analyzing selected examples.

- explain the practices of some ancient Greeks involving sexual relationships between adult men and boys. The emphasis is on understanding the cultural background to philosophical ideas in the assigned text.
- consider in a political science class the way in which gay-rights advocates use arguments borrowed from the civil rights and women's movements. The emphasis is on understanding the arguments on their own terms and perceiving the relationships among various rights groups.
- read a creative non-fiction piece in which a student refers to his or her own identity as a lesbian, gay, or bisexual person. In this case, the professor remains concerned with issues of writing. The professor can, if the student is open to it, initiate a pastoral mode.
- encounter scholarship from the point of view of those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer persons. Usually, this is a matter of evaluating and using the scholarship in one's own work according to the standard rules of one's discipline: quality of evidence, insight, relevance, and so on.

### **C. Teaching/Scholarship: Direct Encounters with Homosexuality-Related Issues**

On the other hand, some encounters with these issues do require more direct consideration in light of our shared commitments.

#### ***Teaching***

Some professors, because of their academic discipline and course design, will treat sexuality as a topic in their classes. In these cases, integrating faith and learning may require a more extensive treatment of Christian ethics and the college's position.

In classroom situations, faculty are called to balance their roles as Christian educators and as representatives of Calvin specifically.

This balance entails two main principles:

1. honoring the CRC position and giving it a fair treatment, in the sense of
  - a. acknowledging the CRC position and recognizing that this position guides policy decisions at the college.
  - b. acknowledging and/or presenting (as fitting to the occasion) reasons for this position, especially those rooted in Scripture and the confessions.
  - c. avoiding dismissing or scorning this position or the value of confessional agreement.
2. acknowledging fairly and honestly that Christians disagree on this topic and that people of good conscience and a high view of Scripture and the confessions hold differing views.

Beyond those principles, many of the best practices for scholarship, described below, also apply to good teaching.

#### ***Scholarship***

Calvin College occupies a beautiful and difficult position in the Christian Reformed Church, in the worldwide Christian community, and in the field of higher education. We are blessed not only with hundreds of deeply faithful, intelligent, highly trained experts in many fields—but also with a calling to use our gifts to serve the church and the world. One way in which we fulfill that calling is



to enter areas of difficulty through our scholarly research and writing. By doing this well, we have the opportunity to advance knowledge, achieve clarity, correct misperceptions, and offer guidance.

Our expertise can be brought to bear on many aspects of sexuality, especially homosexuality. However, we must be honest about the charged nature of the topic and the risks involved. This section, therefore, offers a series of guidelines for engaging in this work faithfully, in accordance with the college's confessional commitments.

- In accord with the college's existing academic freedom policy, all who engage sexual issues in teaching or research are expected to display the virtues of good scholarship in their work, to promote discussion that upholds the authority of Scripture, and to develop their views in harmony with Scripture and the Reformed confessions.
- Calvin faculty who teach and write about sexuality are strongly encouraged to work collegially, sharing work-in-process with peers both at Calvin and at other Christian institutions, and to engage with the common questions outlined in *Strengthening Procedures Around Confessional Commitment and Academic Freedom at Calvin College* (HCL 2, recommendation 8).
- Calvin faculty members who work in this area should expect significant scrutiny of their work, particularly of the kinds of biblical and theological arguments employed. The material provided in this and related documents may be helpful in mapping the kinds of biblical, theological, confessional, and governance questions that are likely to arise.
- At the same time, Calvin faculty members who work in this area should also expect institutional support and gratitude for work that they undertake pastorally, conscientiously, and in ways that are consistent with the confessions. In order to promote the best collaboration and institutional support, faculty should include the college's public spokespersons (appropriate to the topic) as early resources and conversation partners in their work.
- Calvin faculty members who work in this area must be aware of our multiple audiences, from students and alumni who are same-sex attracted, to conversation partners at home and abroad who may assume that any form of engagement with this topic means that we have abandoned biblical authority. We also need to assume that our audience is global, including people from nations or cultures where same-sex unions are legal, as well as others from nations or cultures where same-sex sexuality is taboo.
- Given this, faculty members must hold themselves to a very high standard of scholarly work on the topic, avoiding ad hominem arguments, refraining from misrepresenting other points of view, testing the assumptions behind various methods, avoiding hyperbole that can so easily be misunderstood, and handling the arguments about biblical and theological interpretation with great care.
- Tone is crucial. The tone of our writing and speaking must exhibit graciousness, respect, humility, and pastoral sensitivity to the range of our audiences. This is especially difficult as we can expect that this same respect and sensitivity will not always be returned.

### ***Examining Premises Carefully***

Some premises that are common in discussions of homosexuality would likely be understood as crossing confessional boundaries. Thus, faculty members teaching and working in this area are strongly encouraged to identify and expose these premises. The examples given below—a representative and not exhaustive list—demonstrate the complexity of such a task..

- Personal experience does not trump Scripture, override Scripture, or determine which scriptural texts have import. However, we cannot help but be influenced by personal experience, and it is a matter of wisdom and compassion that we listen to others' experiences and reflect prayerfully on our own. The Holy Spirit can sometimes use our personal experiences, the experiences of others, and the results of scholarship to prompt us to re-examine how we understand certain currents of Scripture. When this happens, we must be prepared to explain how this new understanding harmonizes with the rest of Scripture.
- We do not dismiss ancient texts as *merely* projections of ancient religious experience, and thus as illustrative rather than as normative. However, we acknowledge that in inspiring Scripture, God made use of background knowledge, assumptions, and literature types available in the culture of the originating author and audience. Therefore, we study the ancient contexts as well as the history of interpretation in order to help discern what Scripture is teaching.
- We do not accept the traditional interpretation as normative simply because it is the traditional view. However, we do respect tradition, acknowledging that a consensus of church wisdom over the ages provides important guidance to us. We therefore weigh carefully any emerging interpretations, mindful of our human tendencies to “do what is right in our own eyes” and to see the world through the lenses of our own time and place, just as people did before us.
- We do not simply accept that the involuntary predispositions we are born with are determinative or normative. Instead, we recognize that we all are born with disordered desire—including but not limited to sexual desire. At the same time, we acknowledge that each of us has inclinations that are strongly influenced by genetics and developmental events over which we had no control. We all seek grace and regeneration, therefore, out of a particular set of “givens,” genetic or otherwise, with regard to sexuality. This requires our compassionate consideration.
- We do not believe that scientific study of the “book of nature” can, apart from Scripture, discern God’s intention or design. However, we do hold a high view of nature as an aspect of God’s revelation and of the study of nature as a way of knowing God and God’s works. We acknowledge that scientific study can sometimes be a means by which the Spirit informs, refines, and improves our understanding.
- In our ethical reflection, we do not focus only on the outcome or consequences of an action. Instead, we uphold God’s law as normative for shaping Christian discipleship and consider whether the action conforms to God’s law, regardless of outcome. However, we also seek to imitate Christ, taking care to apply God’s law in ways that reflect God’s mercy and that result in loving rather than destructive consequences for others.
- We do not regard Paul’s or other biblical writings as telling us only about salvation in Christ rather than about a Christian way of life. We retain a biblical foundation to ethics. However, we do honestly acknowledge that we already make judgments—based on tradition, study, and reflection—on precisely how those biblical foundations impinge on ethical choices in our particular time and place. Further, we seek to guard against the temptation of legalism—believing that the way to earn God’s favor is simply by obeying and enforcing certain rules—since this is a barrier to salvation by grace through faith.
- We do not consider any person’s sexuality as automatically pleasing to God and exempt from examination. On the contrary, we acknowledge that the sexuality of all persons is affected by sin, and that every person needs to be redeemed.

## D. Exploration Through Scholarship

This section is meant to function as an interpretation for this topic area of the processes established in *Strengthening Procedures Around Confessional Commitment and Academic Freedom at Calvin College* (HCL 2) and now encoded in the faculty handbook (section 3.6.4). These are the processes that guide a communal examination of a controversial topic, led by the provost and the Professional Status Committee (PSC), and seeking to build capacity around a topic.

In order to protect academic freedom and create a space for discussion of this topic, we have to distinguish between *advocacy* in a strong sense, and *exploration* in conversations, teaching, and writing entailed in communal reflection on a difficult, complex topic. These distinctions are necessary because if the term *advocacy* remains undefined or is too broadly defined, the effect will be to shut down conversation altogether.

Thus, good-faith *explorations and examinations* of this topic in publications or the classroom should be protected under academic freedom policies so long as the faculty members in question follow the best practices described in this document and in the faculty handbook (section 3.6.4).

The term *advocate* in this context refers to claiming a public position based on conclusions reached through study, peer review, and reflection. The emphasis is on *conclusions* and on *public* espousing of those conclusions in the classroom, in publications, or in public communication such as blogs, interviews, and speaking engagements.

Thus we can establish the following premises:

1. Apart from a confessional gravamen, college faculty are not free to deny scriptural authority or to deny the importance of chastity, either explicitly or implicitly.
2. College policy does not prevent Calvin faculty or staff from advocating resistance to civil punishment of same-sex-attracted persons (e.g., as discussed in Uganda) or recommending civil rights for same-sex couples (as in the 2003 CRC committee brief to the Canadian government),<sup>15</sup> provided that this is distinguished from implying a moral or ecclesial judgment about the appropriateness of same-sex sexual behavior.<sup>16</sup>
3. Academic vocation encourages—and academic freedom protects—exploration of this topic.<sup>17</sup>
  - a. Freedom should be allowed for responsible exploration of all evidence regarding the biological, psychological, and sociological factors in same-sex orientation and behavior. Faculty should have freedom to point out how particular moral judgments on the issue might unwittingly shape the development or reception of scientific inquiry.
  - b. Freedom should be allowed for faculty to examine and critique arguments for any position or ethical approach, revealing premises and evaluating reasoning in order to promote sound argumentation in the discussion as a whole and to promote thorough understanding of all positions.
  - c. Faculty should be free to present research and artworks that explore or analyze multiple points of view, subjecting these views to honest, rigorous, and informed assessment.

<sup>15</sup> *Same-Sex Unions: A Case for a Just Pluralism*. A Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights by the Committee for Contact with the Government of the Christian Reformed Church in Canada., 2003.

<sup>16</sup> See Richard Mouw, Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, Stephen Spencer, and David Jones, "Just Saying 'No' Is Not Enough," *Christianity Today*; Alvin Hoksbergen, "Is Anita Bryant Right?"

<sup>17</sup> For a detailed discussion of academic freedom at Calvin College, see *Confessional Commitment and Academic Freedom at Calvin College* (HCL 1).

Since the line between *exploring* and *promoting* a given point of view is complicated, peer review and consultation are part of our normal expectation for faculty work.

4. Any defense or argument for a conclusion that is contrary to the position of the college and the Christian Reformed Church must be based on Scripture and the confessions, as provided for in the faculty handbook (section 3.6.4).

A key component of the processes outlined in section 3.6.4 of the faculty handbook is peer review. Faculty should seek extensive peer review within the college before undertaking public espousal. Part of the peer review process within the college should be a consultation with the departmental chair and the provost to agree on an appropriate “peer review threshold” for the work in question. In other words, faculty members should seek advice regarding how much and what kind of peer review, both inside and beyond the college, is wise and sufficient in their particular cases. Engaging these processes early and proactively will ensure a better outcome for all, including greater opportunity for communal learning and growth, better institutional support, and better communication to constituents.

Section 3.6.4 of the faculty handbook also acknowledges the line of authority that runs from PSC to the Board of Trustees, and then to Synod. Just as faculty should be expected to identify a clear biblical and confessional rationale for a disputed position, so, too, whenever these other bodies might act by making a provisional judgment about an operative boundary, it would seem fair for the faculty and all involved to expect a) significant consultation in the development of any judgment, and b) a clear rationale and grounds for the decision and an indication of the criteria used to make the determination. Without this, there are justifiable concerns about precedent, and about whether the actions of PSC or the board will fundamentally change the ethos of Calvin College.<sup>18</sup>

## E. The Convergence of Public and Private Life

For many college employees, homosexuality-related issues involve personal, family, professional, and church relationships beyond the purview of college life. For faculty, the faculty handbook (section 3.6.4) seems to recognize a private space for faculty members apart from their professional roles, while also acknowledging that faculty are, inevitably, associated with the college in their roles as citizens, family members, church members, and so on. How might we harmonize this kind of private space with the language of the current Form of Subscription, which refers to not contradicting confessional doctrines “publicly or privately”?

It is important to be aware that in a community as large as Calvin College, there are sure to be some people who are same-sex attracted or who have family members who are. An increasing number of community members will likely be invited to attend commitment ceremonies or weddings. Some students, staff, and faculty are members of congregations that include persons in committed same-sex relationships.

With regard to church involvement, the following principles are offered as advice:

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<sup>18</sup> Such consultations and such a rationale were offered in the Howard Van Til case, which involved Dr. Van Til’s teaching on creation and evolution in light of his book, *The Fourth Day* (Eerdmans, 1986). The case is discussed in Anthony J. Diekema, *Academic Freedom and Christian Scholarship* (Eerdmans, 2000), 29-33, and in Harry Boonstra, *Our School: Calvin College and the Christian Reformed Church* (Eerdmans, 2001), 117-133.

1. Faculty and staff are free to be involved in officially sanctioned denominational study committees, if invited to serve in this way.
2. Faculty and staff are free to contribute to church adult education on topics of sexuality. It is wise to remember that the more publicly one speaks, the greater the need for a balanced presentation.

Faculty and staff have the rights and remedies that are afforded under church polities to bring changes in their denominations. Faculty and staff who are members of the CRC have the additional rights and remedies afforded under CRC church polity to bring about changes in the meaning of confessional subscription related to employment at Calvin College. Since these efforts can entail public work that will be associated with the college, consultation with the provost, president, or one's divisional vice president is expected.

3. The faculty handbook (section 3.6.1.1) states, "For the work of the college, the meaning of subscription shall be determined according to the church order of the Christian Reformed Church (e.g., *Church Order*, Article 5, and its supplements)." The faculty handbook also recommends a provision when faculty members would sign a Form of Subscription in their congregation.<sup>19</sup> While the distinction is not altogether clear-cut, the principle is that the college holds authority in matters of teaching and scholarship, while the denomination holds authority in all the rest of that person's life, including worship practices and daily life.

In other areas of private life, the following statements are offered as advice to faculty and staff:

1. Care for same-sex-attracted family members in their personal decisions is a private discretionary matter.
2. Membership or office-holding within a professional body (for example, the American Psychological Association), which may be required by or advantageous to one's work, does not imply that the Calvin employee endorses in every point the public stance of that organization.
3. For faculty and staff with high public visibility connected to the college, it would be in the interests of wisdom and high-trust communication to consult with the provost, divisional vice president, or president before engaging in conduct that may cause public controversy or before taking a public leadership role (such as that of board member) in an organization whose stance is in conflict with that of the CRC.

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<sup>19</sup> "Faculty members who are also church office-bearers sign a slightly different form with respect to their work as office-bearers, which names the church council as the oversight body. In this situation, the faculty member works under the authority of two complementary oversight bodies: the college's Board of Trustees provides oversight for the teaching and scholarly activities and other college-related work of the faculty member; the congregation's council provides oversight for work related to the life of the local congregation. At the same time, the college recognizes that while these functions may be distinguished, they are also difficult to separate. For this reason, the Board of Trustees requests that when a faculty member who is also an office-bearer has "a difficulty with these doctrines or reaches views differing from them," that this concern be disclosed both to the church council and to the Board of Trustees. The board commits to work with the church council to maintain the authority that is appropriate to each body." (faculty handbook section 3.6.1.1)



# **Materials for Contextual Study**

*Received for information by the  
Board of Trustees, May 19, 2012*





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## MATERIALS FOR CONTEXTUAL STUDY

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*This section 1) gives context to our campus policies, practices, and conversations; and 2) identifies areas in need of further reflection and analysis. It is meant to provide materials for further study and discussion.*

### **Mapping the Context**

*This section presents a range of Christian views on homosexuality-related issues, providing a basic introduction to the central theological questions in the wider Christian discussion.*

Many conversations about homosexuality operate with the assumption that there are two broad categories: those who are for the possibility that same-sex relationships can be a way of expressing chastity, and those who are against it. This assumption makes the discussion more difficult because it does not recognize the full spectrum of arguments and the important distinctions among them.

The chart on the following page offers one way to organize the range of current positions.<sup>20</sup> Of course, any schematic representation such as this is problematic because it both clarifies and obscures. This chart is intended (a) to clarify that there is a range of Christian positions on this topic and (b) to outline the key distinctions among the positions.

However, we offer the chart with an understanding of its limitations and with a caveat about potential misunderstanding. Most importantly, we note:

1. These may not be the only positions.
2. Nor should they be viewed as equal, either in terms of the number of people who hold them or in terms of the quality of the argumentation supporting them.
3. The categories and terminology used in this chart are in flux. As the conversation about homosexuality continues, we can expect terms and concepts to change. Even common current assumptions about the concept of sexual identity, for example, are now being called into question.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> This chart is adapted from typologies found in three sources that try to represent a range of views: James V. Brownson, "Gay Unions: Consistent Witness or Pastoral Accommodation?" *Reformed Review* 59.1 (2005): 3–18; William Stacy Johnson, *A Time to Embrace* (Eerdmans, 2006); and Church of England House of Bishops, *Some Issues in Human Sexuality* (Church House Publishing, 2003).

<sup>21</sup> For a treatment of the changing concept of sexual identity, see Jenell Williams Paris, *The End of Sexual Identity* (Intervarsity, 2011).

- Perhaps the most important caveat is that a thoughtful “position” is not the only way people negotiate with an issue. How we think about a complicated issue is difficult enough to determine, but the way we respond in particular contexts to particular people can raise further complexities.

We trust that these limitations will be adequately accounted for throughout the next sections. We present this chart simply as an introductory tool and trust that readers will receive it in that spirit.

**A Range of Positions Among Christians on Same-Sex Attraction, Behavior, and Ethics<sup>22</sup>**

|                                    | <b>Position 1</b>   | <b>Position 2</b>   | <b>Position 3</b>   | <b>Position 4</b>   | <b>Position 5</b>  | <b>Position 6</b>  |
|------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|--|--|
| <i>Summary description</i>         | Condemn same-sex attraction, orientation, and behavior in all circumstances.                | Love the person, but consider same-sex attraction, orientation, and behavior culpable.      | Love the person, consider same-sex attraction and orientation not to be culpable, but consider the behavior to be culpable.   | Heterosexuality is normative, but same-sex orientation is not culpable. Monogamous partnerships may be tolerated as a pastoral accommodation. | Same-sex orientation is a created variant.   | Many sexual variants are valid.  |
| <i>View of same-sex sexuality</i>  | Same-sex orientation and behavior are abnormal and unnatural.                               | Same-sex orientation and behavior are abnormal and unnatural.                               | Same-sex orientation is a burden or affliction, not a part of God’s intention for creation.   | Same-sex orientation is a burden, but <i>can</i> be open to experiences of grace.   | Sexual orientation of all persons can be a source of sin or holiness, depending on how it is expressed and disciplined.                                | Same-sex attraction/ orientation is a created variant as “normal” as heterosexuality. Sexual orientation is an expression of creational variety. |
| <i>Typical view of way to live</i> | Repent of orientation and behavior. Change to heterosexual orientation or live in celibacy. | Repent of orientation and behavior. Change to heterosexual orientation or live in celibacy. | Repent of behavior. Marry heterosexually or live in celibacy. The church should be hospitable to and work with same-sex-attracted persons, calling all to full obedience, even while realizing that not all will. | Exclusive, lifelong same-sex partnerships are better than promiscuity and can be discreetly tolerated by the church.                          | Exclusive, lifelong same-sex partnerships are a means of sanctification that may be blessed by the church. Same-sex partnered persons may be ordained. | Celebrate one’s sexuality as part of just and consensual relationships (not necessarily monogamous or lifelong).                                 |

<sup>22</sup> While useful in representing differences among religious positions on same-sex attraction, behavior, and ethics, the chart seems to assume clear category distinctions between sexual attraction/orientation and sexual behavior that are widely contested in scholarship today. Sexual orientation is understood to be a complex concept that may include combinations of multiple components such as sexual attraction, romantic attraction, various expressions of sexual activity, and embraced sexual identity. See Ritch Savin-Williams, “How Many Gays Are There? It Depends,” in *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation: Perspectives on Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identities*, ed. Debra Hope (Springer, 2009), 5-41. Research also suggests that sexual orientation does not always appear in the same patterns within these component dimensions and is expressed along continua of differences within them. See *Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Clients* (American Psychological Association, 2011). The categories and terminology used in this chart are in flux, and the numbered positions that are identified may not always be compared in clear linear fashion.

## **Explanations and Key Distinctions**

Speaking strictly in terms of arguments and ideas, we can take note of some key features of, and important distinctions among, these positions.

### ***Positions 1 and 2***

The distinction here is mostly one of attitude toward same-sex-attracted people. Since attractions and orientation are considered culpable in themselves, it is difficult to know how to embrace same-sex-attracted people. The result can be practices of rejection (position 1) or efforts at inclusion (position 2).

Neither of these seems to be an “active” position in the conversations on campus, though they have a long history and could be said to be the dominant position of the church throughout history. They also continue to influence attitudes and actions among Christian communities, including Calvin College.

### ***Position 3***

This is the official position of numerous church bodies, including the CRC, Reformed Church in America, Church of England, and Roman Catholic Church.

The key distinction here is that position 3, unlike positions 1 and 2, does not consider people culpable for same-sex orientation, but does hold them accountable for their behavior. Proponents of position 3 uphold the inclination/behavior distinction, the normativity of heterosexual marriage, and the sinfulness of same-sex sexual activity.

Position 3 can generate a greater effort at inclusion, so proponents explore how these convictions play out specifically in the church’s life. For example, a celibate, single person who is not heterosexual is officially welcome to full membership in the church, including ordained office, and church leaders and members are called to hospitality and support for those struggling with sexual orientation. This is not to suggest that communities have mastered living out these official positions. And other questions are more disputed, both in theory and practice, such as how to love members of the church community who choose to commit to a covenantal same-sex relationship.

### ***Position 4***

This view is sometimes called the “accommodationist” view. It maintains that heterosexuality is normative and that sexualities other than heterosexuality do not reflect all that God intends in creation. However, in contrast to position 3, this view maintains that chastity can be expressed in a same-sex relationship. The church may accommodate to the circumstances of non-heterosexual persons by encouraging lifelong, monogamous relationships.

This approach is often compared with the church’s response to remarriage after divorce: The church encourages the most grace-filled, “accommodating” response to a situation that is not as God intended. Within this accommodationist perspective, James Brownson describes two different pastoral strategies, which he labels as “redemptive accommodation” and “pastoral concession.” A “redemptive accommodation” allows same-sex-attracted persons to “express their sexuality within a single committed lifelong relationship . . . under God’s redemptive blessing.” In contrast, a “pastoral concession” view welcomes same-sex-attracted people in the church and tolerates committed lifelong partnerships “as a concession to brokenness,” which nevertheless “should not be understood to be under God’s blessing,” at least somewhat akin to the church’s response to cohabiting but

unmarried heterosexual couples,<sup>23</sup> or to support for wars that violate the criteria of just war theory, or to any number of other sins that the church resists but lives with (gossip, abuse of power, lack of concern for the poor). The distinction is rather subtle and mostly attends to how much acceptance same-sex couples will receive, institutionally and personally.

The accommodationist range of views often rests on a “lesser of two evils” logic, affirming that lifelong, monogamous same-sex relationships are less sinful than promiscuity or (according to some writers) less burdensome than lifelong isolation. Use of this logic calls for the Christian community to test to whether the reasoning is consistent across other issues.

It is important to note that the accommodationist approach still insists that heterosexual marriage is the biblical norm, the way God intended us to live. For example, Lewis Smedes writes, “I still believe the Creator intended the human family to flourish through heterosexual love. I still believe that homosexuality is a burden that homosexual people are called to bear, and bear as morally as possible, even though they never chose to bear it.”<sup>24</sup>

In our discussions on campus, we have heard comments such as, “I am for gay marriages like Lew Smedes was.” Smedes did, indeed, indicate that he believed the church should make room for same-sex partners, but he did not advocate the “affirming” or “consecrationist” position described next—a position with a different reading of God’s creational intent, the effects of the Fall, and the meaning of an inclusive Gospel.

### **Position 5**

The “affirming” or “consecrationist” view<sup>25</sup> is distinct from other views in that it recognizes same-sex orientation as part of the creation as we know it: Same-sex sexuality is an expression of creational variety. Sexual relationships of same-sex-attracted persons should, as for heterosexuals, be consecrated either through celibacy or through a lifelong, exclusive, covenantal relationship.

This view is typically based on variants of three basic arguments: 1) that same-sex sexuality is a dimension of the created order, not a result of the Fall; 2) that the biblical writers were not addressing committed same-sex relationships as we know them; and 3) that the Bible’s vision of inclusion (including the example of the inclusion of the Gentiles) warrants the inclusion of partnered non-heterosexuals today. Entire dissertations could be written on all the variants of these arguments. Also, some of these arguments are prominent in some versions of accommodationist views.

### **Position 6**

Something like position 6 is probably the most commonly expressed or implied view of sexuality—of any orientation—in North American popular music, film, and television. In this view, all sexuality variants are to be accepted as normal. Abusive relationships are not acceptable, but any relationship that is “just” (not characterized by coercion or unequal power) and consensual is a valid expression of sexuality. Lifelong monogamous relationships, in this view, are not the only appropriate context for sexual expression.

Position 6 is not the dominant view in the church, even in North America, although some Christians do argue for it. Many other Christians, though they might not defend the view, still follow these principles in their actions.

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<sup>23</sup> James V. Brownson, “Gay Unions: Consistent Witness or Pastoral Accommodation?” *Reformed Review* 59.1 (2005): 3–18.

<sup>24</sup> Lewis Smedes, *Sex for Christians* (Eerdmans, 1994), 239.

<sup>25</sup> The term is taken from Luke Timothy Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment* (Abingdon, 1996).

### **Views Versus Responses**

As useful as it is to make careful distinctions and give names to various positions on a controversial topic, we have to acknowledge that, realistically, people do not always know what they believe, and even if they do, they do not always act on their convictions, or even know how to act on their convictions. There are, of course, many reasons for this.

For instance, although position 3 is the official CRC position, this does not mean that all CRC people accept it. Many are not even aware of the official CRC position. And no doubt there are groups of people who would fall under each category even within this one small denomination. Some would agree intellectually to position 3, but in their hearts believe position 1—or position 6. Certainly, there are students on Calvin’s campus at every point on the spectrum.

Moreover, even if one has a considered, convicted position on this spectrum, sometimes it is difficult to know how to respond to particular situations, both as individuals and as institutions. Should a parent who holds position 3 accept her son’s same-sex partner into the family? Should a professor who holds position 2 accept an invitation to a former student’s same-sex wedding? Should a church professing position 3 allow a visiting same-sex couple to take communion? Should a church professing position 4 agree to an anniversary celebration in the church basement for a same-sex couple?

Our campus discussions will continue to consider arguments and weigh positions—this is part of what we do in an academic setting. But we realize that these arguments will not take place abstracted from real encounters with real people in complex situations.

One significant gain we can make in our campus discussions is to affirm clearly that positions 1 and 6 are, indeed, inconsistent with the confessions. This may seem obvious, but clarity on these matters can help express a theologically grounded consensus against certain attitudes and behaviors that influence campus life.

For example, we should note that the primary distinction between positions 1 and 2 is one of attitude toward same-sex-attracted persons. Unfortunately, attitudes of disgust and rejection are sometimes expressed on campus, despite our strong anti-harassment policy.

Similarly, the view outlined in position 6 undoubtedly influences the thinking and behavioral choices of our students; perhaps none of us escapes its influence entirely.<sup>26</sup> Part of our work around the topic of sexuality as a whole, therefore, is to unmask this view and its powerful influence, providing a theologically grounded, countercultural case against it.

### **A Simulated Roundtable: Pastoral Care, Biblical Witness, and Same-Sex Sexuality**

In order to better understand the context in which our campus discussions take place, the following section presents a simulated “conversation” among Christians representing the official CRC position (position 3) as well as positions 4 and 5, since the arguments used by these voices respond to and influence discussions across the spectrum.

In a community where commitment to biblical authority is essential, the most significant aspect of the discussion is about biblical interpretation. At first glance, the matter seems clear: The Bible nowhere affirms same-sex sexual behavior, and it does explicitly prohibit it. As New Testament scholar Richard Hays notes:

Though only a few biblical texts speak of homoerotic activity, all that do mention it express unqualified disapproval. Thus, on this issue, there is no synthetic problem for New

<sup>26</sup> For a recent study of the actual sexual behavior of Christian college students, as well as the correlation between sexual behavior and religious attitudes, see Michael Lastoria, ed., *Sexuality, Religiosity, Behaviors, Attitudes: A Look at Religiosity, Sexual Attitudes, and Sexual Behaviors of Christian College Students* (Association for Christians in Student Development, 2011).

Testament ethics. In this respect, the issue of homosexuality differs significantly from matters such as slavery or the subordination of women, concerning which the Bible contains internal tensions and counterposed witnesses. The biblical witness against homosexual practices is univocal.<sup>27</sup>

Yet there are complications. The exact meanings of the Greek terms for homosexuality in Paul's letters are ambiguous and contested. Some conclude that the Bible condemns exploitative pederasty but not covenantal same-sex unions. Texts in Genesis and Leviticus are at times taken out of context. And the meaning and implications of Romans 1:26-28 are hotly debated, often in ways that draw upon very different approaches to biblical authority and hermeneutics.

To further complicate matters, some who call for change in the church's view insist that the biblical writers had no concept of stable same-sex orientation as we know it today. Some writers who defend the church's traditional view contest this point. Others grant the point but insist that it is not sufficient for building a case for same-sex relationships. Others point out that the term *orientation* is often undefined, ambiguous, and socially constructed. Still others point out that this is an argument about the cultural gulf between then and now, which, if treated too casually, can lead to a stance in which the Bible has little if any bearing on contemporary moral decisions. At the same time, the then/now distinction is a form of argument that nearly every Christian uses with respect to some topics (e.g., head coverings, holy kisses, etc.). In general, the Christian community has not thought through how to be consistent with respect to these judgments.

Further, the debate about same-sex sexual relationships should not be limited to the passages that refer to the topic explicitly. Also at stake are the texts that offer positive warrants for heterosexual marriage (Genesis 2, Matthew 19, I Corinthians 7:1-10), including texts that describe a nearly sacramental view of the union of husband and wife as an analogy of Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:32). Texts that speak about the re-appropriation of Jewish law (Acts 15) are also relevant, as are texts about the body/soul distinction, inclusion of outcasts, and so on. Reformed hermeneutics directs that all texts alluding to same-sex behavior must be read in terms of "the analogy of Scripture"—everything that Scripture teaches about creation, creation order, sexuality, marriage, sin, regeneration, holiness, and so on. Specific issues about sexuality, in other words, cannot be decided in isolation from larger perspectives and frameworks of biblical teaching. Thus the concern in the following section is for broad principles of Scripture as well as for particular texts.

The goal of this section is to invite readers to "listen in" on the scholarly conversation, particularly about biblical interpretation. The quotations offered give a roughly impressionistic account, allowing readers who are new to these discussions to quickly gain a feel for main ideas in the various lines of argument, thereby building our capacity for understanding. The HCL working group does not here present an analysis of these arguments, nor does it provide a numerically balanced slate of pro/con on a given point.

One thing to notice immediately is that the various positions interrelate and even overlap in practice. Moreover, not all voices cited in a given category agree fully with one another. In some cases, the person speaking would not necessarily place himself or herself under that particular position heading (since the same arguments are used across positions). The "summary replies" and "commentary" are, of course, editorial constructions. Finally, each quotation should be studied in its context before readers draw upon any of these arguments in research, writing, or teaching.

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<sup>27</sup> Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (HarperOne, 1996), 389.



**Moderator: Positions 3 and 4, how do you apply your views in pastoral settings?**

**Summary reply:** This varies somewhat among us. We hold to the ideal of heterosexual marriage, but we practice varying degrees of acceptance for same-sex relationships.

- a. “Ministry, especially pastoral care, must be specific to each person. Prejudgment is prejudice. Making pastoral assumptions before meeting a person and hearing her or his story is not only poor pastoral care, it also violates an officebearer’s subscription to the Heidelberg Catechism (Lord’s Day 43), which reminds us not to ‘judge anyone unheard.’”

CRC report, *Pastoral Care for Homosexual Members*. Agenda for Synod 2002, 317

- b. “Persons who experience same-sex attractions have some common experiences that require the ministry of the church. The first, and in many ways the most significant of these is their experience of themselves as different, as abnormal, as being not the way most others are.

CRC report, *Pastoral Care for Homosexual Members*. Agenda for Synod 2002, 317

- c. “They may feel shame simply for experiencing the same-sex attraction. This shame can be pervasive. It can isolate the person from genuine community, from a sense of belonging, even from the sense of belonging to the family of God, the church. It can affect their sense of self, including their sense of being a new self in Christ, and lead to depression and suicidal thought. This is a shame about something they did not choose and about something they did not do. It is a shame they do not deserve. Yet it is a shame that erodes their sense of well-being and their sense of love and grace. Some shame may come from behavior that is disobedient to God’s law. Such shame is appropriate and needs to be removed by the cleansing that comes with confession and repentance.

“Shamed persons need the very community they fear. Persons who live with the poison of shame have a deep spiritual need for community, for deep and intimate personal relationships in which they love and are loved and in which they are valued by others. They need the relationships of shared lives, relationships in which they know and are known, known even in the brokenness of their sexuality, and yet are loved and valued.”

CRC report, *Pastoral Care for Homosexual Members*. Agenda for Synod 2002, 317

- d. “The ministry of the church to persons with same-sex attractions begins with enfolding these persons into community while at the same time sounding the message of the gospel that one’s sexual identity is not one’s deepest and true identity.”

CRC report, *Pastoral Care for Homosexual Members*. Agenda for Synod 2002, 319

- e. “Christian ministry begins with compassion... That compassion is the motivational power for ministry. It moves us to reach out and do what we can. It also helps overcome their shame, the shame they do not deserve.

“Compassionate ministry seeks to incorporate those with same-sex attractions fully into the body and life of the church, satisfying their need for community, for intimacy, for oneness with others, and their need to serve their Lord. Much of their sexual struggle lies here. What they need and what sometimes gives desperate urgency to their need is not genital sex but to love and to be loved, to know and to be known, to feel worthwhile about themselves.

“Compassionate ministry begins with lifting the taboo. Love and compassion will help us overcome our apprehension about same-sex attractions or about those persons who experience sexuality this way. We need not stop our ears or avert our eyes. We must break down the conspiracy of silence and the walls of separation, which convey judgment, alienation, exclusion, and loss of hope to our brothers and sisters in Christ and to those outside of Christ who have been shut out of the church.”

CRC report, *Pastoral Care for Homosexual Members*. Agenda for Synod 2002, 326

- f. “The primary pastoral task of the church in relation to all its members, whatever their self-understanding and mode of life, is to re-affirm the good news of salvation in Christ, forgiveness of sins, transformation of life, and incorporation into the holy fellowship of the church. In addressing those who understand themselves as homosexual, the church does not cease to speak as the bearer of this good news. It assists all its members to a life of faithful witness in chastity and holiness, recognizing two forms or vocations in which that life can be lived: marriage and singleness (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4-6; 1 Corinthians 7 *passim*). There is no place for the church to confer legitimacy upon alternatives to these. Pastoral care, however, needs a certain flexibility, taking note of the circumstances which make each individual case different from every other, and discerning ways in which the Gospel touches people in different situations. The church, then, will give constant encouragement in following Christ not only to those who conform to one of these two vocations, but to all who seriously intend discipleship in fellowship with the body of the church.”

Church of England Evangelical Council, “St. Andrew’s Day Statement” (1995)

- g. “The church should continue to call those who are homosexual by orientation—derived from either biological or environmental factors—to a ‘heroic’ response. That is, they should be called to practice sexual abstinence, sublimating their sexual energies into other pursuits. The church has long honored such ‘heroic’ responses and should continue to do so.

“It would be naïve to argue that this can be the church’s only response. In our present culture, some Christians who are homosexuals by orientation will engage in sexual relations with members of their own sex. Given this fact of life, the church should discreetly support those who try to maintain the bonds of fidelity. Such behavior is certainly a lesser evil than the promiscuity practiced by part of the homosexual community. The church accepts many less-than-ideal arrangements among its members—divorced clergy, for example—and can certainly accept and affirm those homosexual Christians who take the difficult road of fidelity. This should be done with all discretion and taste so that neither the normative tradition of the church nor the persons involved are compromised.”

Robert Benne, *Ordinary Saints* (Fortress, 1988), 151–152

- h. “It would seem to us possible that the church might accept what it would be improper to its role actively to bless or celebrate.”

[Summary of ensuing section]: Refusing to acknowledge committed relationships between same-sex couples may, given the power of sexual drives, lead to serious harm, but it does not follow that the church should bless what it cannot affirm as at least pointing toward God’s intention for human life. This “acceptance without celebration” rubric is similar to a variety of “lesser of two evil” arguments, such as Thielicke’s suggestion



that same-sex-attracted individuals have to realize their optimal ethical potentialities on the basis of their irreversible situation.

Paul Jewett, *Who We Are: Our Dignity as Human* (Eerdmans, 1996), 342

- i. “We acknowledge that some gay Christians may choose to commit themselves to a life-long, monogamous homosexual union, believing this is God’s best for them.... Even though we hold to the model of a heterosexual, lifelong, monogamous union, our compassion brings us to support all persons as they move in the direction of God’s ideal for their lives. A suffering Jesus knows the way and longs to meet those who seek him.”

Jack and Judith Balswick, *Authentic Human Sexuality*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (IVP Academic, 2008), 136

- j. “I acknowledge that in this deeply troubled world some people will find the first serious and genuine love of their lives in a homosexual relationship. I believe therefore that such relationships can be condoned, cautiously, for pastoral, therapeutic reasons as temporary accommodations to some people’s particular injuries and needs. The church nonetheless does not ‘bless’ such unions, let alone ‘normalize’ them, but upholds scriptural sexual and relational ethics as the ideal toward which we all strive. In the meanwhile, however, we can appreciate the sad truth that some people will have to take the long way home, and a caring homosexual relationship may be a necessary part of that journey. This is clearly a difficult area of pastoral ethics and requires deep theological, psychological, and spiritual wisdom.”

John G. Stackhouse, Jr., *Finally Feminist* (Baker Academic, 2005), 89, footnote 25

- k. At the Anglican Lambeth Conference in 1998, a resolution was passed (by a vote of 526-70) stating that homosexual acts are “incompatible with Scripture.” The statement also called “on all our people to minister pastorally and sensitively to all irrespective of sexual orientation and to condemn irrational fear of homosexuals, violence within marriage, and any trivialization and commercialization of sex,” and added, “We commit ourselves to listen to the experience of homosexual persons, and we wish to assure them that they are loved by God and that all baptized, believing and faithful persons, regardless of sexual orientation, are full members of the Body of Christ.”

Lambeth Conference, “Resolution 1.10 on Human Sexuality” (1998)

**Commentary:** These quotations reveal the overlap between positions 3 and 4 in practice. Often, these approaches are striving toward integrity with respect to the church’s posture on any number of other areas in which we do not live up to God’s will, including marriage and divorce, spousal and child abuse, gossip, gluttony, economic injustice, and violations of just war.

**Moderator: Position 5, how do you account for the creation norms in the Genesis account?**

**Summary reply:** The creation norm is that people are given capacity for intimate, lifelong relationships that mirror trinitarian relationality. What is essential for human beings, then, is the capacity for relationality. Gender differences are typically, even foundationally, a part of this relationality, but true, sanctifying relationality is still possible for same-sex-attracted persons. Some of us argue that same-sex sexuality is an example of creational variety and is not the result of the Fall.

- a. “The man-woman relationship as described and laid out in the creation stories can be understood as foundational rather than limiting or restrictive. It is paradigmatic for human relations rather than restricting them. In various ways employment of the adultery image indicates that we have in the marriage relationship and its protection something that points us to various relationships and identifies the critical thing as keeping covenant and not harming the neighbor’s relationship.”

Patrick Miller, *The Ten Commandments* (Westminster John Knox, 2009), 205

- b. “What the text says does not yet tell us what it teaches; that happens only when the text is perceived from some angle of vision. For Lehmann, as it should be for all of us, that angle is the gospel, which he described as what God was and is doing to make and keep human life human. . . . Lehmann reads Genesis 1-3 as giving a norm in the form of what he calls a foundational instance. Lehmann describes a created order in which a generative, enduring sexual relationship between a man and a woman plays a central role. But the centrality of one kind of relationship does not imply the sinfulness of every other kind of relationship. . . . Read in light of the gospel, under the rule of faith and the rule of love, Genesis depicts a created order in which procreative sexual relationships between women and men are a central—but not the only—faithful response to God’s work of keeping human life human.”

Patrick Miller, “What Does Genesis 1–3 Teach About Human Sexuality, and How Should We Live in Response?” in *Frequently Asked Questions About Sexuality, the Bible, and the Church*, ed. Ted A. Smith (Covenant Network of Presbyterians, 2006), 14–15. See also Paul Lehmann, *The Decalogue and a Human Future* (Wipf and Stock, 2002).

- c. “We would do well to remember that what seems ‘natural’ or ‘unnatural’ is not fixed for all people and all times. In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul claims that it is ‘unnatural’ for women to have their heads unveiled and for men to have long hair, but few contemporary Christians feel compelled to agree with Paul’s understanding of nature in that case.”

Beverly Roberts Gaventa, “What Does Romans 1 Teach About Homosexuality, and How Should We Live in Response?” in *Frequently Asked Questions About Sexuality, the Bible, and the Church*, ed. Ted A. Smith (Covenant Network of Presbyterians, 2006), 33

- d. “Normally, Reformed people would not be tempted to derive their sense of what is ‘natural’ straight from the Bible, nor would they use the Bible to become informed and knowledgeable about homosexuality. Reformed Christians have a long tradition of regarding the Bible as a book of faith and not as a text for geology (the flood), biology (evolution), hygiene (purity code), economics (jubilee), or whatever else. The Bible gives us our ultimate perspective, our fundamental orientation for our lives, but does not provide us with data and concepts we can simply and directly use in our time. Its concrete morality is not and cannot be ours. It is not a moral text. Christian faith is not moralistic.”

Hendrik Hart, in foreword to Pim Pronk, *Against Nature?* trans. John Vriend (Eerdmans, 1993), xiii

- e. “Homosexual love can serve—as much as heterosexual couplings—as an icon of godly love, a sacramental participation in Love Divine.”

Marilyn McCord Adams, “Trinitarian Friendship: Same-Gender Models of Godly Love in Richard of St. Victor and Aelred of Rievaulx” in *Theology and Sexuality*, ed. Eugene Rogers (Wiley-Blackwell, 2002), 336

- f. “Some people, therefore, are called to same-sex partnerships for their own sanctification. Opposite-sex partnerships wouldn’t work for them, because those would evade rather than establish the right kind of transformative vulnerability. ...The difference between members of a same-sex couple is not ‘merely psychological,’ but also an embodied difference, if only because sexual response is nothing if not something done bodily. Difference cannot be reduced to male-female complementarity, because that would leave Jesus a deficient human being. Jesus did not need a female other half to be fully human. ...If this account is correct, then it turns out that conservatives wish to deprive same-sex couples not so much of satisfaction as of sanctification.”

Eugene Rogers, “Sanctified Unions: An Argument for Gay Marriage,” *Christian Century* 121.12 (2004): 29

- g. “[T]he body that really matters is the Body of Christ, and the bodily features of a relationship are relevant only with respect to whether they can be taken up into that Body. That question, in turn, depends at least in part on whether a bodily relationship is shaped by Trinitarian virtues, and whether it enacts (or is at least in the process of learning to enact) Trinitarian practices. A mutual and peaceable sexual relationship is always better than a hierarchical or violent one, regardless of questions about bodily form or sexual orientation.”

David Cunningham, *These Three Are One* (Wiley-Blackwell, 1988), 301

- i. “I want to make clear that I hold my position because of the Bible, not in spite of it. In my best moments, when, as Paul says, I accept the grace to want ‘what I want’ (Romans 7:14-20), what I truly want is to live my life in alignment with God. Since I like Paul am not naturally inclined to do that, I cannot imagine how it would be possible without scriptures that judge and contradict as well as comfort and affirm. I need scripture to say what it says, not to agree with me or confirm my preferences. In this case, I know that some passages put homosexual practices in a negative light, but these like the many precise biblical injunctions that Presbyterians do not observe are overridden by much more blatant testimony. God rules everything. Through the whole history of God’s dealings with us, God has exercised God’s freedom to demolish categories we invent for our own convenience. I am convinced that God is doing this today, demolishing the categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality which we constructed for our peace of mind, not God’s glory. I want to testify here that I did not learn about this deconstructive activity of God from some liberal political handbook. I learned it from the scripture that deconstructs me, freeing me, as Paul says, to delight in the law of God.... I want to affirm that, as conservative Presbyterians emphasize, the Christian life is a disciplined life. On this matter, I am a conservative too. We follow Jesus Christ, who gave his life for the life of the world. If we want to live in his light and walk in his way, we too will be called to sacrifice, and among the things we are likely to be required to give up—some of our wealth, some of our power—are immediate sexual gratifications that would cause injury or pain to others. Foregoing something as pleasurable as sex is not easy. We need God’s help, through the church, to find the grace to do that. Far from helping, however, the church’s current teaching on sexuality militates against sacrifice and restraint. Homosexuals get no help at all in making moral decisions about their sexual behavior; all of it is simply dismissed as bad. Heterosexual relationships get off lightly too, if they are monogamous, because we think they are God’s favored form. I am convinced that the equal treatment of homosexual and heterosexual relationships,

including the recognition that marriage is God's gift for both, would strike a blow, not for sexual license, but for much-needed sexual discipline."

Barbara Wheeler, "True Confession" (address given at the Covenant Conference, Network of Presbyterians, Atlanta, Georgia, November 6, 1999); available online at [www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=530](http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=530)

**Moderator: Positions 3 and 4, how do you respond to these arguments about creation norms?**

**Summary reply:** We cannot assume that everything we observe in the creation as we know it is "natural" in the sense of following God's created order. Human desires are an aspect of a fallen creation.

- a. "[T]he moral basis for human sexuality is not inferred out of biology...but out of the command of God that summons humans to live out the divine image under the conditions of their creaturely nature and existence." Thus, it wouldn't matter what biology teaches us about the origins of homosexuality.

Ray Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology* (Intervarsity, 2001), 277

- b. "His [Rogers's] discussion is Manichean in that [Rogers's contention is that] the constitution of our humanity as male and female is not a form that comes from the good God—and [his argument is] Pelagian in that it praises too much our desires as we find them, not letting the needed transformation cut deeply enough to put to death the sinful self."

Gilbert Meilaender, "What Sex Is—and Is For," review of *Sexuality and the Christian Body* by Eugene Rogers, *First Things* 102 (April 2000), 46

- c. "What we examine when we study what is 'natural' is what is distorted, incomplete, or contingent, even if it bears traces of God's grace in its capacity to be reformed toward order, purpose, and reliable relationship. ... Hence to argue that some moral aspect of life is 'natural' on the grounds of its frequency or 'innateness' or because people feel it is intrinsic to their way of thinking, feeling, or being may not be to state that it is the way God intended it to be in creation. It may be, in fact, to state that what is experienced as natural may be in need of alteration, remediation, and redemption."

Max Stackhouse, *Covenant and Commitments* (Westminster John Knox, 1997), 39

- d. "In speaking about the creation order, we need to be clear that this is something other than our present experience of nature or what is natural. The effects of the fall have been far reaching, including the natural order. Although our biology may be a clue to God's design for us, it is not an infallible clue, for our biology and chemical nature is fallen, influenced by sin, just as our spiritual nature is fallen. We must be cautious about drawing conclusions about God's will from the natural order of sexual experience.... For instance, scientists suggest that monogamy is unnatural for human beings and that infidelity is 'in our genes.' This does not mean that infidelity is a part of God's creation order. Scripture clearly tells us otherwise. Scientists suggest that homosexuality may be genetic, but again, this does not mean that God designed people to have various sexual orientations. "

Laura Smit, *Loves Me, Loves Me Not* (Baker Academic, 2005), 49

- e. "Many of the advocates of unqualified acceptance of homosexuality seem to be operating with a simplistic anthropology that assumes whatever is must be good: they have a theology of creation but no theology of sin and redemption."

Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (HarperOne, 1996), 402

- f. “As genetic predispositions to everything from cancer or diabetes to novelty-seeking behavior or homosexuality are being reported almost daily in the scientific literature, a new and dangerous brand of genetic determinism is subtly invading our culture. Carried to its extreme, this ‘Genes R Us’ mentality would deny the value of social interventions to maximize individual potential, destabilize many of our institutions, and even deny the existence of free will. Surely a world in which every aspect of human behavior is hard-wired into our genes cannot comfortably exist with the concept of personal responsibility and free will to try to follow the moral law of right and wrong which people of faith believe has been written into our hearts by a loving and holy God.”

Francis Collins, foreword to *Playing God?* Ted Peters, 1996

**Moderator: Positions 3 and 4, how do you respond to the idea that we must listen to people’s experience of their sexuality, or to their spiritual life as it relates to their sexuality?**

**Summary reply:** We are sinful people, and therefore must be very careful about giving serious normative theological weight to our experience.

- a. “We don’t want to change the historic faith; we want the faith to change us. This is the great submerged reef that will continue to shipwreck understanding until we learn to recognize it. It is futile to begin the sexuality conversation with sexuality itself; that skips over the question of where we get the tools by which we evaluate sexuality. Beneath it all, we have two vastly different ways of viewing ancient faith, and our press releases are faxed from different floors of the Tower of Babel.”

Frederica Mathewes-Green, *Gender: Selected Writings*, vol. 1 (Conciliar Press, 2002), 169

- b. “Human nature as we experience it—a nature in which body and spirit have quarreled—cannot itself provide the norms for human sexual behavior. What seems ‘natural’ to us may, in fact, be contrary to our nature as God’s creatures. Behavior that is natural in the sense that we are readily drawn to it, may in fact be unnatural—inappropriate to who we truly are. Experience alone—the prompting of love alone—cannot here be our sole tutor and guide; for our experience is broken and distorted. It must be reshaped and redirected with the guidance of Scripture.”

Gilbert Meilaender, “Homosexuality in Christian Perspective,” in *Things That Count* (ISI Books, 2000), 62

- c. “[W]e dare not permit the church’s public teaching, on the matter of homosexuality or any other matter, to be taken over and determined by a desire—however sincere and well-intentioned—to ‘affirm’ every person in whatever state he or she may be. That is not the gospel.”

Gilbert Meilaender, “Homosexuality in Christian Perspective,” in *Things That Count* (ISI Books, 2000), 76

- d. “[C]laims about divinely inspired experience that contradicts the witness of Scripture should be admitted to normative status in the church only after sustained and agonizing scrutiny by the consensus of the faithful. ... In any case, it is crucial to remember that experience must be treated as a hermeneutical lens for reading the New Testament rather than as an independent, counterbalancing authority. ”

Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (HarperOne, 1996), 399

**Moderator: Positions 3 and 4, what about the idea that same-sex relationships can be expressions of sanctifying relationality?**

**Summary reply:** This represents ethics based on the result or consequence rather than on the action itself.

- a. “Emphasis upon the quality of the relationship alone, upon the giving and receiving of love within a consensual relationship does not and cannot by itself provide the necessary content and structure for love as Christians have understood it.”

Gilbert Meilaender, “Homosexuality in Christian Perspective,” in *Things That Count* (ISI Books, 2000), 62

- b. “For the consequentialist, sexual acts, like all acts, are merely movements of bodies, capable of being judged morally only when we peer into the future to determine the results which flow from them. With the advent of relatively effective contraception and means of avoiding, preventing, or curing sexually transmitted diseases, however, ‘the results which flow from’ sexual acts are likely to seem negligible. Thus, consequentialism fosters the notion of casual sex and represents a meta-ethical obstacle to the acceptance of the idea that certain sexual acts are in and of themselves wrong, or as we might prefer to say, ‘demeaning,’ that is, contrary to the meaning which sexuality has within human nature properly understood.”

Michael Banner, *Christian Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems* (Cambridge, 1999), 275

**Commentary:** This area of argumentation reveals the need for further exploration of “natural law” theories (more typically Roman Catholic) and “creation order” approaches (more typically Reformed). The Belgic Confession affirms the created universe as revelatory, but this does not determine how we weigh the results of scientific or other forms of study. The results of biological or psychological studies, for example, cannot be presumed equivalent to general revelation or natural law, but how then do we weigh their role?

**Moderator: Position 5, how do you approach the texts commonly used as evidence that same-sex sexual behavior is prohibited by God’s law?**

**Summary reply:** The biblical writers did not know of loving, covenantal same-sex unions. The relevant texts in Leviticus, Romans, and 1 Corinthians condemn other things: heterosexual people who went against their own nature and/or the kind of abusive, cultic, or unjust same-sex sexual activity that was common in ancient culture.

- a. “There is within these statutes [those of the Old Testament] no reference to or thought of same-sex relations occurring within a continuing relation of affection and commitment and responsibility for each other. Like the provisions against intercourse with animals, they assume the male-male sexual activity as a specific momentary act and not a part of a continuing relationship, though one cannot assume that such a statute would not have been written if there were such a presumption.”

Patrick Miller, *The Ten Commandments* (Westminster John Knox, 2009), 293



- b. “When the Bible takes the worldview of its original audience for granted as background, accepting the authority of the Bible need not mean accepting the truth of the worldview.” [The passage refers to assumptions about the flat earth, and intimates that assumptions about sexuality could be similar.]

William Placher, “What Do Presbyterians Believe About the Authority of Scripture?” in *Frequently Asked Questions About Sexuality, the Bible, and the Church*, ed. Ted A. Smith (Covenant Network of Presbyterians, 2006), 8

- c. “Paul does not operate with a notion of homosexual (or heterosexual) ‘orientation’ in the contemporary sense; instead, his language reflects the Greco-Roman world’s understanding of sexual relations among people of the same gender as discrete acts rather than a homosexual orientation or lifestyle.... We need to understand that Paul is addressing a different question than the ones we are asking.”

Beverly Roberts Gaventa, “What Does Romans 1 Teach About Homosexuality, and How Should We Live in Response?” in *Frequently Asked Questions About Sexuality, the Bible, and the Church*, ed. Ted A. Smith (Covenant Network of Presbyterians, 2006), 32

- d. “The Bible does not tell us anything about a condition called homosexuality.... The Bible does not tell us how people get to be homosexual people.... The Bible does not tell us whether homosexuality is ‘curable.’... The Bible does not tell us about the sorts of persons homosexual people are likely to be.... The Bible tells us that homosexual behavior is unnatural, but does not explain why it is unnatural.... The Bible does not tell us about the personal quality of homosexual relationships.”

Lewis Smedes, “Exploring the Morality of Homosexuality,” in *Homosexuality and Christian Faith*, ed. Walter Wink (Fortress, 1999), 78-81

- e. [Summary]: Paul is condemning only exploitative and promiscuous relationships.

Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality* (Fortress, 1983)

**Moderator: Positions 3 and 4, how do you respond to these exegetical arguments?**

**Summary reply:** “Cultural gap” arguments can lead to dismissing the Bible as an ethical guide. Paul’s prohibitions are sufficiently analogous to our present questions.

- a. “As a classicist, I have to say that when I read Plato’s *Symposium*, or when I read accounts from the early Roman empire of the practice of homosexuality, then it seems to me they knew just as much about it as we do. In particular, a point which is often missed, they knew a great deal about what people today would regard as longer-term, reasonably stable relationships between two people of the same gender. This is not a modern invention, it’s already there in Plato.... I think we have been conned by Michel Foucault into thinking that this is all a new phenomena [sic].”

N. T. Wright, “Interview with Anglican Bishop N. T. Wright of Durham, England,” interview by John Allen, *National Catholic Reporter*, May 28, 2004. See also E. P. Sanders, *Paul* (Oxford 1991), 110-113

- b. “To be sure, the nineteenth century concept of ‘orientation’ does not seem adequate to Paul’s world, but it is also inadequate to our own. Human sexual experience is varied indeed.... Human sexual desire ranges across a continuum, and the moral question is not why our

desires draw in one direction or another but what behavior is right or wrong. The diversity of sexual desire in our world is, it turns out, very much like the world Paul knew.”

Gilbert Meilaender, “Homosexuality in Christian Perspective,” in *Things That Count* (ISI Books, 2000), 72

- c. “Using the analogy of Scripture, Reformed ethics attempts to discern the universal principles taught in the Bible and to distinguish them from applications of principles that might be limited, temporary, or culturally specific. Identification of these principles is what enables us to apply Scripture to contemporary situations the Bible does not specifically address: abortion, euthanasia, global economics, and many others. Using methods of Reformed hermeneutics and ethics, it is impossible to say that Scripture does not address the kind of homosexual activity envisioned by the voices for change in the position of the CRC.”

John Cooper, “Do We Need to ‘Revisit’ 1973?” *Calvin Seminary Forum* 4.3 (Fall 1997): 2

**Commentary:** Arguments about Paul’s references to homosexuality in 1 Corinthians 6:9 often focus on what Paul’s terms meant.<sup>28</sup> In fact, many of the arguments about New Testament passages seem to boil down to analysis of terms. While term analysis is a necessary and helpful exercise, it is unlikely that definitions of terms in themselves will finally resolve larger issues about same-sex sexual behavior.

Meanwhile, arguments about the references in Leviticus are often poorly handled on all sides of the debate. The texts cannot be simply asserted as a defense of the traditional position when other Levitical injunctions are set aside. Neither can the text be simply ignored, as if, in the name of Christian supercessionism, Jewish law doesn’t matter. Exploring this issue could be very fruitful in learning about the nuanced way that Christians have long interpreted the book of Leviticus for this and other matters.

**Moderator: Position 5, what biblical support would you give for same-sex covenantal relationships?**

**Summary reply:** The divine embrace of the ritually unclean is analogous to the church’s welcome of same-sex-attracted persons. A good biblical example is found in the welcoming into the church of the Gentiles, who were ritually unclean (Acts 10-11, 15; Galatians 2; Romans 11:24; perhaps Isaiah 56).

- a. “As God grafts Gentiles, the wild branches, onto the domestic covenant of God’s household with Israel, structured by the Torah of the Spirit, so God grafts gay and lesbian couples...by a new movement of the Spirit onto the domestic, married covenants of straight women and men.”

Eugene Rogers, *Sexuality and the Christian Body*, (Wiley-Blackwell, 1999), 65

- b. “To be a Gentile was, in the eyes of Jews and Jewish Christians alike, the same as being a sinner, since the Gentiles did not have the law, since they were by definition unclean, polluted, and idolatrous. They first had to repent of being Gentiles and adopt the purifying and transforming practices of God’s covenant people, the Jews, before they could

<sup>28</sup> The conservative view is upheld by Bruce Winter, “Homosexual Terminology in I Corinthians 6:9: The Roman Context and the Greek Loan Word,” in *Interpreting the Bible*, ed. A. N. S. Lane (Apollos, 1997), 131-146.



become Christians. And yet the experience of Peter and Paul led them, and eventually many others, to the realization that, even as a Gentile, one could come to know God, worship God, and to receive and show the Spirit of God. To be a Gentile did not by definition mean to be a sinner... Despite our experience, do we insist that homosexual Christians can have the Spirit of God only if they are 'heterosexual homosexual' Christians? Or with Peter and Paul are we up to the challenge of recognizing, perhaps with surprise and with humility, that gay and lesbian Christians, as gays and lesbians and not as sinners, have received the Spirit of faith?"

Jeffrey S. Siker, "How to Decide? Homosexual Christians, the Bible, and Gentile Inclusion," *Theology Today* 51.2 (July 1994), 230

- c. "The narrative in Acts 10-15 unfolds in four stages:
1. *At the outset the social context with its taboos carries unquestioned authority...*
  2. *The taboo is challenged by experience.*  
Peter receives a set of heavenly visions forbidding him to count as unclean what God has cleansed, and is given instructions by the Spirit, which match those Cornelius receives from an angel... Moreover, Peter 'sees' the Holy Spirit fall on Gentile converts as they listen to preaching...
  3. *Over a period of time, the institution 'learns from the Spirit' and changes its policies...*
  4. *The Spirit's taboo-toppling was the key to the spread of the gospel."*

Marilyn McCord Adams, "Hurricane Spirit, Toppling Taboos," in *Our Selves, Our Souls, and Bodies*, ed. Charles Hefling (Cowley, 1996), 129-130

**Moderator: Positions 3 and 4, are analogies to other groups valid arguments in this case?**

**Summary reply:** There are reasons against analogies between same-sex-attracted people and Gentiles. As for analogies to other issues, such as women's ordination, slavery, usury, pacifism, or divorce, the difference is that there are biblical trajectories that argue against scriptural texts that condone slavery, prohibit usury, or prohibit women from teaching, while the biblical witness on same-sex sexual behavior is unified and consistent, allowing no basis for appeal.<sup>29</sup>

- a. "Only because the new experience of Gentile converts proved *hermeneutically illuminating of Scripture* was the church, over time, able to accept the decision to embrace Gentiles within the fellowship of God's people."

Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (HarperOne, 1996), 399

- b. "There is here, one has to say, a certain amount of sleight of hand. No doubt God may be said to show His solidarity with every form of sin in saving all sorts of sinners. We need not conclude—and Paul did not seem to conclude—that those sinners who seek to follow Christ should simply continue in sin that God's grace may abound... When those first Jewish Christians realized that the Holy Spirit seemed to have been poured out upon the Gentiles, they did not regard that experience as self-authenticating and decide that their scriptures were wrong to have spoken of the election of Israel. On the contrary, this experience forced them to return to those scriptures and discover in them a truth they had previously overlooked: that God's covenant with Abraham was, from

<sup>29</sup> See also William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals* (IVP Academic, 2001), and R. T. France, *A Slippery Slope?* (Grove, 2002).

the start, intended for the blessing of all nations, so that the Gentiles too might come to Zion. It is profoundly misleading, therefore, when Rogers writes, ‘What is natural is that God should love the Jews especially. What is unnatural is that God should incorporate the Gentiles into that love.’... When, however, the Spirit was poured out upon the Gentiles, the Church did a new thing: Gentiles were to give up their pagan gods and worship the God of Israel alone, yet this did not mean that they had to become Jews (by being circumcised, keeping the Sabbath, etc.). To turn to Israel’s God did mean, however, to seek holiness of life. To renounce their ancestral gods meant renouncing behavior associated with idolatrous rejection of God’s creative design for human life—behavior that on the evidence of Romans 1, includes homosexual behavior.”

Gilbert Meilaender, “What Sex Is--and Is For,” review of *Sexuality and the Christian Body* by Eugene Rogers, *First Things* 102 (April 2000), 45. See also Richard Bauckham, “James and the Jerusalem Church,” and “James and the Gentiles (Acts 15:13-21).”

- c. “To point out that divorce or chattel slavery or other such departures from the plain sense of scripture have been condoned and justified by Christians is in fact to establish the general principle that God has a revealed identity and will and that one has a right to expect some conformity to this as essential to the Christian life. Only in this way can subsequent generations see that corrections were both needful and demanded, as consistent with God’s very self and his revealed truth. Wilberforce did not mount arguments against slavery by appeal to new truth, or by dividing the persons of God, but appeal to revealed truth—that is, that public, available, and plain truth rooted in scripture and in God’s character as manifest there.”

Christopher Seitz, *Figured Out* (Westminster John Knox, 2001), 52

## Issues in Biblical and Confessional Interpretation

*This section outlines some important questions to consider as we discern confessional boundaries related to homosexuality.*

### A. How do same-sex partnerships relate to the confessions?

During our campus discussions, some have wished to determine whether or not positions on same-sex covenantal partnerships are “confessional.” Since the confessions ought to shape our approach to every issue, this line of debate can be misleading.<sup>30</sup> To be sure, the desire to make a categorical statement on whether the topic of same-sex partnerships “is” or “is not” confessional is understandable. Since the texts of the confessions do not explicitly address the topic, we want to know whether subscription to the confessions requires a particular position on same-sex relationships—or gives no instruction on the matter.

Yet an either/or question may not yield an adequate answer. Some positions regarding homosexuality clearly fall outside the confessional boundaries, some fall within them, and some are disputed. Indeed, some Christians who are proponents of same-sex partnerships are at the same time critical of certain Christian defenses of same-sex partnerships, since those defenses violate scriptural teaching. Further, some proponents of same-sex partnerships would repudiate the confessions and build their case on very different doctrinal positions. Therefore, to avoid confusion, it would be best to avoid the categorical phrases *confessional* and *not confessional* with respect to this issue. Instead, a better question is, “In what way do the confessions bear on this issue?”

To respond to that question, we can recognize the Reformed confessions relating to this issue through at least these three broad principles:

- a) The Heidelberg Catechism calls believers to chastity (a term that in the sixteenth century did not allow for same-sex sexual behavior).
- b) The Belgic Confession calls believers to respect the authority of Scripture in all matters of faith and life.
- c) The Heidelberg Catechism defines good works as those that “arise out of true faith, conform to God’s law, and are done for God’s glory.” (HC 91)

Because of the distinctive policy on academic freedom at Calvin, in which the Reformed confessions provide the formal boundaries to that freedom, working with these principles will be of central concern to us, even though other Christian bodies might approach the discussion in very different ways. So we will almost certainly need to debate under what conditions a sixteenth-century definition of a term holds for us today, and which particular approaches to same-sex relationships are consistent with the authority of Scripture.

Before outlining these matters, it will be helpful to distinguish among the different kinds of boundaries at stake.

1. The “policy boundary” for the college is grounded in the CRC’s synodical position and affirmed by the Board of Trustees’ 2008 memo. Synod’s position is “settled and binding” with respect to policies concerning hiring, sexual conduct of faculty and staff, residence hall rules, student life programming, and any official statements on the topic.

<sup>30</sup> See *Confessional Commitment and Academic Freedom at Calvin College* (HCL 1).

- 2 The “academic freedom boundaries” would be discerned by determining which positions may be deemed “consistent with the confessions.”

The CRC has in some instances distinguished between boundaries: for example, declaring that women could not be ordained (since reversed) but also declaring that advocating for this position did not infringe on a confessional boundary. The specific question before us then, is whether advocating for positions 2, 4, or 5 *in a professional capacity* (e.g., in scholarship) could be considered consistent with the confessions.

3. More difficult to discern are what we might call the “non-academic boundaries.” Is advocacy of positions that depart from the official CRC position permitted in informal conversations, including conversations with students? What about in a non-professional capacity as a member of, for example, a congregation? What actions in these settings constitute advocacy?

Because some forms of advocacy for same-sex partnerships are more clearly inconsistent with the confessions, discussions of the exact nature of confessional boundaries cannot be avoided. But while the need for boundaries seems fairly self-evident, knowing exactly where to draw those boundaries, and with what kind of finality, is not as clear. The confessions certainly *bear* on the issue, but how are they *binding*? The following issues, at least, need to be considered to decide that question.

### **B. What does the language in the Heidelberg Catechism about chastity entail?**

The first important topic concerns the meaning of the term *unchastity* (*Unkeuschheit*) in the Heidelberg Catechism (108, 109):

Q. What is God’s will for us in the seventh commandment?

A. God condemns all unchastity. We should therefore thoroughly detest it and, married or single, live decent and chaste lives.

Q. Does God, in this commandment, forbid only such scandalous sins as adultery?

A. We are temples of the Holy Spirit, body and soul, and God wants both to be kept clean and holy. That is why he forbids everything which incites unchastity, whether it be actions, looks, talk, thoughts, or desires.

There are two basic positions regarding how this text relates to same-sex sexual relationships. One view argues that in the sixteenth century—and in subsequent centuries—chastity has been widely understood to proscribe same-sex sexual behavior (e.g., see Ursinus’s commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism. Ursinus was co-author of the catechism).<sup>31</sup> The Heidelberg Catechism is assuming a scriptural definition of chastity, which is binding given the confessions’ teaching about scriptural authority. The meaning of the term is biblically determined and should not be treated as an “elastic” term that changes meaning over time.

A contrasting view notes that the confessions were written in a time in which the concept of same-sex orientation was not recognized. The writers assumed that same-sex behavior entailed persons acting in opposition to their own true nature. But since the concept of same-sex orientation has been articulated and refined, not everyone agrees that such persons are acting in opposition to their nature. Moreover, research suggests the sixteenth-century understanding of chastity

<sup>31</sup> *The Commentary by Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism* (Eerdmans, 1956), 591. Ursinus, *Explicationum catecheticarum* (Cantabregiae, 1587), 803. See footnote 6 on page 11.

would also have prohibited contraception, masturbation, and divorce (on grounds other than abandonment and adultery).<sup>32</sup>

Both of these readings can be found among Christians who value the confessions. Some read the confessions and conclude that they do not address modern, Western same-sex relationships. Some read the material on chastity in the catechism and conclude that this means that sexual relations should be expressed only in a marriage relationship between a man and woman, and that all those not in a heterosexual marriage are called to abstain from sexual relations. Some argue that chastity is a principle that can be interpreted to allow for expression in same-sex relationships.

### **C. Can a defense of monogamous, lifelong, same-sex relationships be grounded in the authority of Scripture and honor Scripture's clear teaching?**

A second related but distinct question focuses on the confessions' claims about scriptural authority (BC 5, 7). Ultimately, our decision about boundaries around this topic comes down to issues of hermeneutics and biblical authority, not whether the confessions explicitly address the topic. The question, in short, is whether one can coherently affirm the authority of the Bible—as confessional subscription entails—and also defend monogamous, lifelong, same-sex relationships.

Indeed, several of the published Christian defenses of lifelong, monogamous, same-sex relationships have been made by people who would *not* agree with the Reformed confessions' claims about the authority of Scripture. For example, one writer has argued for change in the church's historic view on the basis that an “experiential or existential view says that the Bible is authoritative only in those parts that are existentially engaging and compelling—that give grounding and meaning to existence,” concluding that “in the light of contemporary knowledge and experience, we can justifiably override the unconditional biblical condemnations of homosexual practice.”<sup>33</sup> However, the fact that some people use this kind of argument does not mean that anyone who espouses change must necessarily or inevitably hold this view of scriptural authority.

There are several publications that present biblical arguments for and against the CRC's position on same-sex behavior—enough to assure proponents of various positions that there are arguments to support their point of view. But the process of sorting out these arguments and discerning which ones are truly sound has largely not taken place in the Calvin community. The CRC Synod's 1973 report addresses some but not all of these arguments.

Historically, Reformed hermeneutics has operated with a symbiotic relation between the confessions and Scripture. The best practice of reading Scripture yields the doctrines taught in the confessions. The view of Scripture taught in the confessions yields a particular way of reading Scripture and learning what it teaches. How does this symbiotic relation affect hermeneutics for these topics? Over time, analyzing the underlying hermeneutics of various positions may prove to be one of the most fruitful projects for the Calvin community to pursue.

One of the central questions we face related to biblical interpretation is this: How can we best assess how underlying cultural attitudes of both the biblical writers and contemporary culture affect our interpretation? We regularly make such assessments regarding things such as usury, po-

<sup>32</sup> Section 3.6.1.1 of the faculty handbook says of signing the Form of Subscription: “A subscriber is only bound by subscription to those doctrines which are confessed, and is not bound to the references, allusions, and remarks that are incidental to the formulation of these doctrines nor to the theological deductions which some may draw from the doctrines set forth in the confessions. However, no one is free to decide for one's self or for the church what is and what is not a doctrine confessed in the standards. In the event that such a question should arise, the decision of the assemblies of the church shall be sought and acquiesced in.”

<sup>33</sup> Dan O. Via and Robert A. J. Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* (Fortress, 2003), 2, 38.

lygamy, property rights, astronomy, and views of the universe, sometimes underemphasizing and sometimes overemphasizing the continuities and contrasts between historical periods.

Therefore, any case for monogamous, lifelong, same-sex relationships would need to address the deeper hermeneutical issues involved in deriving ethical standards from Scripture. Such an argument would have to include both a discussion of the specific biblical texts that speak about same-sex sexual behavior—aware of changing conceptions of sexuality over time—as well as a discussion of the larger biblical vision for sexuality, Christian vocation, and holiness. Such a case would need to account for the fact that there are no direct texts in the New Testament that condone same-sex practices or relationships, in contrast to the topics of racial and gender equality for which there are texts that ground an egalitarian vision. Moreover, at its best, such a case would not be limited to simply removing the (obvious or apparent) biblical barriers to same-sex covenanted relationships, but would also address the topic positively, considering the *charisms* and vocations that same-sex-attracted persons have for deepening the discipleship of the entire Christian community.

#### **D. How do we understand God’s law and obedience to it?**

The confessions require obedience to God’s law. They affirm that good human actions are those that “arise out of true faith, conform to God’s law, and are done for his glory” and are not “based on what we think is right or on established human tradition” (HC 91). (This principle, of course, can cut both ways on any controversial topic.) The confessions affirm the significance of God’s law for shaping human obedience:

We believe that the ceremonies and symbols of the law have ended with the coming of Christ, and that all foreshadowings have come to an end, so that the use of them ought to be abolished among Christians. Yet the truth and substance of these things remain for us in Jesus Christ, in whom they have been fulfilled. Nevertheless, we continue to use the witnesses drawn from the law and prophets to confirm us in the gospel and to regulate our lives with full integrity for the glory of God, according to his will. (BC 25)

Many—perhaps most, perhaps all—defenses of same-sex sexual relationships are based on moral reasoning that focuses on the motivations for certain actions and the results of certain actions. This kind of moral reasoning can be seen as affirming the idea that good works “arise out of true faith and are done for God’s glory and human sanctification,” but might be seen as putting less emphasis on “conforming to God’s law.” From this view, “character ethics” or “consequentialist ethics” are instructive but incomplete.

#### **E. Where does the burden of proof lie?**

The relationship of the college to the denomination, as outlined in the faculty handbook, does have implications for burden of proof. The documents of the CRC explain that, when a person submits a gravamen to change a confession, the burden of proof rests on the person submitting the gravamen. Many in the church would also internalize this approach with respect to controversial topics, insisting that the burden of proof rests with those who seek change.

It is fair to expect that any Calvin faculty members who do question the CRC position on homosexuality will be able to explain to PSC and the Board of Trustees how their views are consistent with the confessions—how their view promotes chastity and honors the authority of Romans 1 and other key texts as interpreted by Synod, for example—and what the implications of their



position might be for other ethical issues (e.g., premarital sexual activity). Such Calvin faculty should also be able to trust that those who may judge their work will be doing so on the basis of scriptural teaching as interpreted in light of the doctrines in the confessions. Since any view on this topic can be held for insufficient reasons, holding one another accountable for making sound, properly grounded arguments can make a productive difference for both the tone and the content of the discussion.

A more basic reason that the burden of proof should be on the side of those who advocate a change in the church's historic position is that any change in a social issue that affects so many people is very unlikely to be reversed. The debate between infra- and supra-lapsarians, while intense at the time, did not result in a decision that was complicated to reverse. Eventually, fewer and fewer people found the issue to be one of great existential concern. In contrast, it is nearly impossible to imagine reversing course on an issue like women's ordination, especially after many women are ordained. Sexuality issues are more like the second issue than the first. Many lives are affected whether or not there is any change, and a decision about how to proceed is likely to be very influential for years to come.

The academic freedom policies explained in the faculty handbook and in *Confessional Commitment and Academic Freedom at Calvin College* (HCL 1) provide further guidance. Section 3.6.4 of the faculty handbook describes the implementation of Christian principles of justice and charity in relation to any complaints about faculty work:

Every faculty member, whether tenured or untenured, shall be entitled to the right of academic freedom in the performance of his or her duties. The faculty member shall be judged only by the confessional standards of Calvin College, and by the professional standards appropriate to his or her role and discipline. A faculty member shall not be expected or required to retract or modify his or her utterances merely because a complaint against them has been received. Only complaints which allege a violation of confessional or professional standards shall be considered, and then only when the evidence supporting the allegation is more substantial than rumor or hearsay. By making this commitment to its entire faculty, Calvin College seeks to implement the Christian principles of justice and charity in its own community.

HCL 1 states:

A healthy culture of confessional subscription and academic freedom is dependent upon a climate of trust, transparency, mutual encouragement, and accountability. In our work together, our standard mode of operation should be with high-trust communication patterns that presume good motives and confessional integrity on the part of all parties: faculty, administrators, and the Board of Trustees.<sup>34</sup>

## **F. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in biblical and confessional interpretation?**

We enter challenging topics of biblical and confessional interpretation with the grateful awareness that we depend upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In *The Word of God for the People of God*, Reformed theologian J. Todd Billings warns against “deistic” approaches to exegesis, which (often subconsciously) discount the active, living presence of God. Instead, he writes, we need to pray for and expect the guidance of the Spirit as we study Scripture together:

<sup>34</sup> *Confessional Commitment and Academic Freedom at Calvin College* (HCL 1), 22.

Faithful readers are open to being reshaped by the Spirit through Scripture, refusing to set their own experience as a fixed standard by which to judge Scripture. We should approach Scripture with attentiveness to the other voices in the Christian community, both past and present. In this we are attentive to the Spirit's work in and through the traditions of the church. Faithful readers also apply a hermeneutic of suspicion toward their own culture's perception of Scripture, combined with a trust in the transforming power of the Spirit through Scripture.... Scripture should be interpreted from a self-consciously ecclesiastical place, yet the church finds its life by living under the Spirit's word through Scripture, not alongside or over it.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> J. Todd Billings, *The Word of God for the People of God* (Eerdmans, 2010), 141-142.



## Conclusion

As part of our academic vocation, we seek the wisdom brought to the discussion from the resources of our various disciplines. In addition to biblical studies and theology, many disciplines offer relevant and useful insights about sexuality, including biology, psychology, cultural anthropology, and sociology. Recent work suggests a complex interplay of genetic and contextual factors that contribute to various sexualities. Other work suggests that sexual orientation may vary in its stability, so that previously assumed categories may, in fact, be too simplistic.

As with all research in any field, it is the particular challenge of the Christian academy to test background assumptions in the field of inquiry. Of particular importance for us at Calvin is the question of the significance of this interdisciplinary learning for our moral reasoning regarding sexuality. The study of God's creation certainly has relevance to our study of Scripture. But the Bible also helps us read creation and reminds us that what we study through biology and psychology and other disciplines is a fallen creation.

Moreover, sexuality issues have significant political and legal ramifications. Reformed Christians have often distinguished between moral claims that Christians insist upon for the Christian community and claims that Christians insist upon in a pluralistic political context. Indeed, some Reformed Christians who do not condone or permit same-sex sexual relationships in the Christian community do argue for civil rights for same-sex couples (e.g., the Canadian CRC's Committee for Contact with the Government). This distinction, however, is difficult for some people and can be perceived as confusing in discussions about the topic. Here again, those who are adept in the fields of political science, history, philosophy, and media studies have important contributions to make to our collective understanding and discernment.

Precisely because of the discomforts and tensions inherent in a period of societal uncertainty, the Calvin community needs careful, outstanding, confessionally grounded reflection on many topics raised in this document. Amid a broader cultural conversation marked by poor arguments, knee-jerk reactions, and sound-bite communication, we as a Christian academic community have the opportunity to model a better way. It is our prayer that our continued conversations about this topic at Calvin will serve the church and continued conversations in the academy.

Many questions have emerged concerning sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular. The following represent some questions that are frequently raised both inside and outside the church, and that deserve scholarly work:

- How does the paradigm of Creation–Fall–Redemption relate to this topic? What are the implications of the Fall for the diversity within the creation? What are the biological and psychological aspects of these implications?
- What is the nature of the Holy Spirit's healing work with respect to sexuality? What does redemption mean for human sexuality?
- What is the body for? What does marriage mean? Which particular reasons for marriage are truly biblical? What is the theological and moral significance of sexual desire?
- Is the orientation/behavior distinction tenable? How is this distinction similar to or different from the natural inclination/behavior distinction in other areas of moral reasoning?
- How can we best test and examine our assumptions about what is "natural"? What are the similarities and differences between the natural law tradition associated with Roman Catholicism and the creation order tradition associated with Reformed Christianity?

- What can the scientific disciplines tell us about the biology, physiology, neuropsychology, etc., of sexuality, including that of same-sex-attracted people? How might this contribute to our understanding of scriptural principles on sexuality and on pastoral approaches for all people?
- How might we reassess our understanding of family and the church in order to make the body of Christ our “first family”? Have we elevated marriage and family too highly in our theology and communal practice? Could we develop a robust theology and practice of singleness and lifelong friendships within the body of Christ? What might an ecclesiology look like that places marital status (and sexual orientation) subordinate to Christian identity?
- What is identity? How is identity formed? How much is chosen; how much is given? How can we create practices that help all members of the church understand their primary identity in Christ?
- How might we strengthen the church’s and the college community’s support for chastity for all persons? How can we help one another resist secular culture’s powerful influence toward sexual permissiveness?
- How do the cultural contexts in which we live—including popular culture and academic culture—shape our approaches? What legitimate roles do experience and testimony play in our ethical reflection and reasoning?
- How does science sharpen our understanding of Scripture? What we can learn from past episodes in church history when science sharpened or obscured scriptural understanding?
- What are the Christian community’s responsibilities to same-sex-attracted members? Which kinds of hospitality are consistent with Scripture? Are there valid accommodating strategies that may be analogous to the kinds of accommodating strategies the church has practiced with respect to divorced persons? How might this topic, in turn, make us simultaneously more faithful and sensitive to respond to divorce? What is appropriate pastoral advice by the Christian community to, for example, a same-sex couple who come to faith after having developed their life together, or a same-sex couple who desire to send their children to a Christian school?
- How do we promote unity in the body of Christ when believers uphold different views, ecclesial practices, and family structures?

When we face such difficult questions, we must resist the demand for easy answers. But if we address them together, based on our common commitments and with compassion for those who have felt excluded or devalued in the past, we can come to a better understanding of what it means to obey the Lord’s command to love one another. We will need the guidance of theologians, philosophers, social scientists, and biologists to understand our situation and our obligations more clearly. We will also need to listen to our students, our fellow parishioners, and our neighbors, reminding one another that uncertainty is not unorthodoxy. When others find our attitudes and actions lacking in conviction or compassion, we should not dismiss their criticism but, rather, should look for common ground that will enable us to go forward together. Above all, we must pray together that the college and the church will be granted the wisdom to welcome and encourage all members of the community in a spirit of Christ-like compassion and Spirit-guided obedience.

Respectfully submitted  
 Homosexuality and Community Life Working Group  
 Calvin College, April 23, 2012

## APPENDIX I

### A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

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The term *homosexuality* does not quite capture all the dynamics of issues relating to this topic. Current usage generally prefers the terms *lesbian*, *gay*, *bisexual*, and *queer* (LGBQ) to denote those who identify as other than heterosexual. *Transgender* refers to an experience of gender rather than sexual orientation or identity. The physiological condition called *intersexuality* is another related but distinct category. Since the working group's mandate was to address homosexuality, we have not attempted to tackle specific questions of intersexuality or transgender experience in this document. We recognize, however, that these realities affect the lives of people within our community.

Further, it is necessary to distinguish among varying levels of experience with same-sex attraction. There are important distinctions between same-sex attraction, same-sex orientation, same-sex sexual behavior, and claiming an identity (privately or publicly) as a lesbian, gay, or bisexual person. Feelings, orientation, behavior, and identity cannot easily be conflated, since people's experience varies widely, as do their intentional responses to that experience. Jenell Williams Paris offers an important treatment of these matters from an evangelical Christian point of view, in *The End of Sexual Identity: Why Sex Is Too Important to Define Who We Are*.

Finally—as is so often the case in sensitive areas of conflict—what is considered accurate and respectful language is constantly changing. After much deliberation, the HCL working group has decided in this document to use the term *homosexuality* to refer to same-sex sexualities outside the heterosexual majority, understanding that this is not an entirely satisfactory general term. When speaking of people, we will usually refer to people who are *same-sex attracted*. When the context allows, we strive to use more precise terms, such as *same-sex sexual behavior*. It is our understanding that people at many places in the discussion currently accept these usages as neutral and respectful. In some instances, we refer to *sexuality* in general. This is a way of acknowledging that no discussion of homosexuality can take place apart from a broader contextual discussion of human sexuality in all its complexity.



## APPENDIX 2

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*The following documents were approved at the May 2010 meeting of the Board of Trustees. They are available at [www.calvin.edu/admin/provost/facdocs](http://www.calvin.edu/admin/provost/facdocs).*

- Confessional Commitment and Academic Freedom at Calvin College* (HCL 1)
- Strengthening Procedures Around Confessional Commitment and Academic Freedom at Calvin College* (HCL 2)

#### C. Homosexuality and Christian Theology

##### Typology of positions and multiple viewpoint debates

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## APPENDIX 3

## HISTORICAL NOTES ABOUT CONFSSIONAL INTERPRETATION, BOUNDARY DRAWING, AND HOMOSEXUALITY

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To help imagine the complexity of confessional interpretation, the following examples or precedents may be helpful to note. Only those statements documented here can be attested or proved. Other statements are offered as the best judgment of our working group.

1. The Wittenberg Articles<sup>36</sup> specifically state, “We confess simply and clearly without any ambiguity what we believe... in the same meaning which the creeds themselves intend and in which the approved fathers hold, use, and defend them.”<sup>37</sup> This was not explicitly stated in any Reformed confessional document. It may have been assumed at various points, but it is not stated.

2. Disagreement with some confessional statements would typically be judged not to be weighty, including (a) the judgment of Judas and Simon the Sorcerer described in article 35 of the Belgic Confession, (b) the specific division of the law in Heidelberg Catechism QA 93, (c) the use of Genesis 1:23-26 as a proof text for the Trinity in Belgic Confession article 9, (d) the selective use of certain biblical manuscripts or translations of 1 John 5:7 as a Trinitarian proof text in Belgic Confession article 9, and (e) whether the relationship of body and soul in a human person is an apt analogy for the relationship of Jesus’ divine and human nature (Athanasian Creed).

3. Most would assume that we are not bound to *all* assumptions that may have been held by sixteenth-century writers, e.g., that the term *day* refers to something twenty-four hours long. The question is “to which assumptions are we bound?” and “is the term *chastity* one of them?”

4. Other matters involve a judgment call. For example, arguably, we are not necessarily bound to every sixteenth-century assumption about what is meant by the terms *body* and *soul*, but we are bound to uphold the distinction to the extent that it is necessary to hold the view that when we die, we go to be with the Lord (e.g., HC 57, Romans 14:17).

5. On some issues (e.g., women’s ordination) multiple views have been judged to be consistent with the confessions by the CRC Synod. Synod 1989 deemed that “Decisions made by Synod at least since 1978 indicate that the “women in office” issue has not been regarded as a creedal matter, but as a church order matter” (*Acts of Synod*, 1989. 433).

6. Some confessions have been amended, or their presentation has been altered: 1) Belgic Confession article 36, which states that it is the role of the state to “remove and prevent all idolatry” and false worship, 2) Heidelberg Catechism 80 concerning the Roman Catholic Mass, 3) Belgic Confession language concerning the Anabaptists. Church leaders, including faculty members, needed the freedom to argue for these changes to be possible.

7. The original intent of the “chastity” language in the Heidelberg Catechism has also been used by some, especially the Roman Catholic magisterium, to resist birth control. This raises the

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<sup>36</sup> The Wittenberg Articles were the product of Anglo-Lutheran negotiations in 1536 when efforts were made to reach a doctrinal formula acceptable to both the English government of Henry VIII and the German Lutheran theologians.

<sup>37</sup> See Jaroslav Pelikan, *Credo* (Yale, 2005).

question of whether it is consistent to ignore some aspects of the “original intent” of the term *chastity* (and permit birth control) and to insist on others (the assumption that only heterosexual relationships could be chaste). This argument may not be resolvable, but it should be noted.

8. The CRC Synod has drawn confessional boundaries in the past. In its 1974 decision on Pentecostalism, it noted, “Anyone who holds the second-blessing teaching is thereby disqualified for the office.” The reference here is to those who hold the teaching that baptism in or with the Holy Spirit is a second blessing distinct from and usually received after conversion (*Acts of Synod*, 1974, 31).

9. The CRC Synod has also refused to define a confessional boundary in the case of Sabbath observance, referring the matter to local consistories (*Acts of Synod*, 1940, 102ff).

10. The CRC’s action with respect to specific professors and/or pastors:

- R. Janssen (*Acts of Synod*, 1922, 125ff.).
- D.H. Kromminga (*Acts of Synod*, 1945, 1946, 1947)
- John H. Stek (*Acts of Synod*, 1983, 521-523, 644-646)
- Clarence Menninga (*Acts of Synod*, 1987, 26, 594)
- Howard Van Till/broader discussions about evolution (*Acts of Synod*, 1989, 320-324, 347-348, 391, 399, 519-522; *Acts of Synod*, 1994, 276-277, 451)
- C. Libolt (*Acts of Synod*, 1981, 48, and 1982, 605)
- Hessel Bouma III (*Acts of Synod*, 1996, 313-314, 469, 528; *Acts of Synod*, 1997, 443-445, 604-605)

11. The CRC has discussed the nature and authority of its decisions, and which are judged to be interpretations of the confessions (*Acts of Synod*, 1975, 595ff; *Acts of Synod*, 2000, 213-216).

12. The CRC has discussed what it means for a decision to be “settled and binding” related to academic freedom (*Acts of Synod*, 1995, 323-324, 749-751, 753; *Acts of Synod*, 1996, 315-316, 469, 528; *Acts of Synod*, 1998, 202-208, 425-426).

13. The RCA has refused to insist that all office-bearers hold a traditional view on homosexuality on the grounds that it would be an extra-canonical test for ministry. It is unclear whether the RCA considered the matter as an interpretation of the existing confessions (which the CRC and RCA share).<sup>38</sup> At the same time, it did issue sanctions to a RCA pastor and theologian for officiating at a gay marriage ceremony.

14. In 1997, the *Banner* reported that a Christian school teacher was dropped from a study committee because of views on homosexuality (Jan. 20, 1997), and also that a Christian school teacher lost a contract over views on homosexuality (May 19, 1997). In 1997, a pastor faced suspension for views on homosexuality (Feb. 17, 1997).

15. Synodical decisions in 1994, 1999, 2002, and 2011 can be found at [www.crcna.org/pages/synodical.cfm](http://www.crcna.org/pages/synodical.cfm).

<sup>38</sup> See Donald J. Bruggink, “Extra-Canonical Tests for Church Membership and Ministry,” in *A Goodly Heritage*, ed. Jacob Nyenhuis (Eerdmans, 2007), 54-63.



## APPENDIX 4

## CALVIN COLLEGE BOARD OF TRUSTEES STATEMENT ON HOMOSEXUALITY AND COMMUNITY LIFE (MAY 2008)

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*The Board of Trustees adopted the following statement in May 2008 and reaffirmed the statement in May 2009.*

### **Background**

Human sexuality is an inescapable part of our cultural conversations and permeates politics, popular culture, the media, and more. However, the discourse on human sexuality in the public square frequently is marked by competing assumptions, by misconceptions and mistrust, and by shrill simplifications that ultimately do not lead to better understanding.

Calvin College is not immune to the cultural conversations on human sexuality. Nor do we wish to avoid these important discussions. Rather, we want to lead our students in the conversations and lead them to a deeper understanding of the important issues that they will face on a regular basis as graduates. So we provide a place at Calvin for discussions about human sexuality, including homosexuality, to take place.

These discussions take many forms, everything from our participation in national health surveys to week-long events designed to explore a wide range of topics surrounding human sexuality to numerous classes in which issues of human sexuality—from biological, psychological, theological, and political perspectives—are discussed.

Calvin College has operated, both implicitly and explicitly, in matters of human sexuality within the frameworks adopted by the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), including the CRC's position on homosexuality (see, e.g., *Handbook for Teaching Faculty*, section 6.1.2 and the Policy on Discrimination and Harassment). This position includes three important components: It laments the treatment of gay and lesbian persons by many in the Christian community, it commends the active encouragement and support of gay and lesbian persons, and it prohibits sexual practice outside of heterosexual marriage (see "Pastoral Care for Homosexual Members," 2002).

The college has attempted to honor these components through its condemnation of any harassment of students based on sexual orientation, by active support of gay and lesbian students, and via direct teaching related to the position of the church.

The topic of homosexuality is a significant one. Both current and prospective students, and their parents, ask about the college's approach to homosexuality. They also expect that their experiences here will mirror what they have been told. The Calvin Board of Trustees receives numerous inquiries, commendations, and complaints on this issue during the course of a typical school year. These kinds of questions are likely to increase, not decrease, in the years ahead. And they invite us to think and work together as a community to provide answers that are both clear and appropriately nuanced, both humble and unapologetic.

This position calls us as a college to be a place where a student—whether gay, lesbian, or heterosexual—can come and be supported in pursuing chastity in the context of openness, hospitality, accountability, and support.

At this time, any work on this topic is likely to be very challenging, especially given the polarizing rhetoric about homosexuality in so many political, cultural, and church-related conversations. Because of this potential, it is important to state several values that should guide our work on them together:



- **SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITY AND CONFSSIONAL IDENTITY.** We work, live, teach, and learn at Calvin College under the authority of Scripture and our commitment to the Reformed confessions.
- **INSTITUTIONAL INTEGRITY.** It is crucial that we live, work, teach, and learn in the context of institutional integrity. What we teach in the classroom should fit with what we tell prospective students. The events we sponsor and host should match the message that we communicate about ourselves in the public sphere. We want to be a place of openness, trust, transparency, and integrity.
- **ACADEMIC FREEDOM.** Calvin College is committed to academic freedom in the context of our confessional commitments. Careful attention to academic freedom requires that we give careful attention both to the responsibilities and freedom of Calvin faculty members and to the nature of fair expectations that Calvin's student body and constituency can and should have about Calvin faculty members. The college's position with respect to academic freedom is not widely understood by our students and constituency, and perhaps not by many faculty members who have not had occasion to reflect on the topic.
- **CONCERN FOR SEXUAL FAITHFULNESS FOR ALL PERSONS.** The topic of homosexuality should not be treated apart from discussion of other dimensions of human sexuality. Sexual chastity and faithfulness is a biblical mandate for all persons. The college should strive to encourage this calling throughout its communal life. We want to be a place where chastity for all persons is valued, nurtured, and prayed for.
- **TRANSPARENCY AND PUBLIC WITNESS.** Many in the Christian community feel great anxiety about topics of human sexuality. Indeed, the church and many individual Christian theologians, pastors, and other leaders have been reticent to address homosexuality. However, silence is not the answer. Active engagement is the only way to discern the truth. The college is eager to encourage vital Christian witness with the right blend of conviction and humility.
- **DENOMINATIONAL IDENTITY AND MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY.** The college approaches the topic of homosexuality deeply aware of the significance of our relationship with the CRC, and eager to continue to work at a relationship of mutual accountability with the CRC.

The Board of Trustees wants to ensure that Calvin College's approach to homosexuality and heterosexuality is marked by consistency and integrity throughout the institution, and models how to speak with clarity and integrity in the public square about matters of sexuality.

Each of these values tap into deeply held longings of many students, staff, faculty, and constituents. In a culture of acrimony and simplistic judgments, there is a longing for transparency to replace silence, for shared wisdom to replace isolation, for covenantal accountability to inform academic freedom, and for disciplined love for each other to mark our communal life.

**Therefore, the Board of Trustees of Calvin College:**

- affirms the work of the college in stressing that for the Christian, our identity is in Jesus Christ and that our sexual orientation, while important, is secondary to our primary identity as sons and daughters of God.

- affirms the CRC position on homosexuality, which is the biblical position as historically understood by Jews and Christians—and calls for active support, encouragement, and inclusion of gay and lesbian persons and prohibition of homosexual practice—as the official position of the college and the guiding framework for campus policies.
- expresses gratitude for all who have worked so diligently on many aspects of this issue over the past several years (e.g., hosting the Equality Ride visit, the student support group, teaching courses with related content, Broene Counseling Center services, chapel) and for all who have forged a more supportive climate for students who are gay and lesbian.
- and recommends:
  - that the college pay special attention to the values outlined above so that we are consistent in what we believe and how we teach.
  - that a small working group led by the provost and vice president for student life be appointed by the Board of Trustees to further and refine the implementation of Calvin's position throughout the college, specifically its implications for teaching, advising, writing, counseling students, and college programming.
  - that the college develop materials to guide public communication about these guidelines in ways that model effective Christian communication in the public square.