Meadowvale Community Christian Reformed Church November 13, 2020

**OVERTURE**

Do not accede to the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-Laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality’s recommendations B, D, E and F as the report includes neither the voices of the LGBTQ+ community who are living in committed monogamous relationships nor those of cisgender members who hold differing biblical views regarding human sexuality. We disagree that the “heart of the gospel is the call to repentance and faith” (page 147) but rather that love and grace are centered as the heart of the gospel.

**Grounds**

1. The report, rather than offering relevant, life affirming discourse on sexuality, further alienates, disregards and condemns LGBTQ+ persons in its continued refusal to center the voices of those who are not called to celibacy and are seeking, or are committedly living in, monogamous relationships.
2. The report is lacking in the grace and inclusivity of a creator God from whom we have never been separated.
3. The pastoral advice given is at times ill-advised, condemnatory rather than inclusive, and contains echoes of the ex-gay mindset.
4. The report causes lament for those of us in our local church who have grown in our understanding of inclusivity, as it will result in further painful division within the CRC.

**Forward**

Synod 2016 appointed a committee to define a biblical theology pertaining specifically to conceptions of gender and sexuality. This report has now been presented to the denomination for evaluation and response. As the local congregation of Meadowvale Community Christian Reformed Church, we desire to respond. While we recognize the great amount of work put into the writing of the report, we feel that the conclusions presented do not represent the calling that has been placed upon our local church to be a welcoming, healing, inclusive extension of Christ’s work within our community and city. We are not comfortable with the assertions therein that this is the path to the “radical new way of living” to which the apostles called the early church and to which the Church is called today. We will specifically address the Preamble (Current context and Mission, p. 6,14), section III (Creation and the Fall, p.15) and section XIII (Homosexuality: Pastoral care, p.114).

**Dissent**

While we agree that God created sex to be good and to be enjoyed between two people that love each other deeply, we challenge the insistence that this only exists between a man and a woman. Our spirits are open to hearing from those who love deeply outside these strict, binary confines. In terms of “current context,” we fully agree that sex has been “tainted” by sin and can be “brutally destructive” today. However, the flow of this section implies that the changing sexual mores are *all* as result of sin, consigning numerous mores into one category. For example, “the use of pornography by younger people is assumed” and the laws to “prohibit discrimination based on gender expression or identity” are both listed as examples. We would support the latter movement.

Regarding the church’s response as confusing and dividing, we would agree. The church has not always been silent on this subject as many people, in decades past, were forced to publicly confess their sin, such as seeking divorce from an abusive partner, which resulted in shunning from the community that forced this repentance. Silence has felt more loving in comparison to that practice, but it has also created silence in any who needed direction and support as they wrestled with questions regarding their own sexuality, identity or practices. As per mission, we challenge the assertion that the Christian Reformed Church “has a living tradition of deep love for the scriptures coupled with a willingness to engage courageously with the ideas of our time” as this is simply not true. For many, there is a history of pain, grief, judgment and humiliation.

Additionally, when the failures of the church are listed, we believe the first failure is not our inability to help each other refrain from sinning, but that the emphasis should be on the third point: recognizing the pain we, as a church, have caused in those whom we have judged and driven from the church. Our lack of love for all, and our practice of making the church a place of privilege for the heterosexual norm, is our biggest failure.

Section III B—Creation: Genesis 1-2 (page 16)

The report’s summation of Genesis 1:28 is as follows. “Here the humans are blessed with fertility and instructed to multiply, fill, and subdue. The humans are created in the image of God for the purpose of ruling the earth. The blessing of God will enable the realization of that rule.” This analysis is not surprising as it is traditional, but it falls short of having contextual relevance for the issues all of God’s people are facing today, and for which the committee was convened.

One can continue to read Genesis 1 and 2 as they have traditionally been interpreted. However, Adam’s first exclamation upon seeing Eve was a joyful recognition of commonality: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” This established her as a helpmate, a partner suitable for Adam. Commonality, mutuality is what is celebrated and of primary import in Genesis. They would be the same but different in a myriad of ways, as in every committed relationship. The report acknowledges that we have grossly mistreated the LGBTQ+ persons among us. Continuing to uphold a binary differentiation with the emphasis on genital difference as the only meaningful, legitimate difference, perpetuates the harm and prevents any further and fuller interpretations in a biblical text that is a living document. We believe that all are created in God’s image, as Genesis 1:27 states, regardless of how one identifies, and we desire to welcome, know and value each individual.

Additionally, we believe that the continued emphasis upon marriage being ordained for the purpose of procreation is an archaic and harmful interpretation. The report states, “The point is that to be male is to possess male sexuality and to be female is to possess female sexuality, and that to exercise one or the other through procreation is essential to fulfilling God’s creation mandate.” We refute the assertion that procreation is essential in a marriage to fulfill God’s purposes for that relationship. Other biblical passages do not define marriage by procreation, but by faithfulness to each other, as in Hannah and Elkanah (1 Samuel 1:8). In addition, is there no imagination or vision for those who are single and how they fulfill God’s creation mandate? Or do they not?

Thirdly, in Section III B we find problematic the continued use of biblical versions of Genesis that emphasize the calling of humanity to reflect God’s image by ruling and subduing the Earth. Other versions, like E. Peterson’s The Message translate this verse as “have responsibility for” the Earth. The continued use of a ruling, subduing verbiage is related to the mindset that has allowed the gift of sexuality to become destructive and weaponized; the gift of creation, which has revelatory value, to be destroyed; and is also related to how we view the Creator and anyone who identifies as different from us. Connotation is of great import.

Thus, Section III B is problematic for us in its narrow interpretation of marriage, which alienates, disregards and excludes many of God’s children, it’s focus on procreation rather than faithful, covenanted love being the call of marriage, as well as in the domineering language used.

Section III C—The Fall, Genesis 3 (page 19)

 We find the language in this section on the “Fall” to come from a viewpoint of a punitive God as a judge whose primary focus is to punish the disobedience of man and woman. The focus is then on legal transactions. We prefer to begin from a different viewpoint: that of a loving God whose focus is first and foremost, and never changing in this focus, that of being *relational*.

When we read the Fall through the lens of a God who is passionate and deeply caring for those God has made in their (plural as God is Trinitarian) own image, we see the Fall as something that caused a deep alienation from our very selves, and a veil over our eyes so that we can no longer see God as God is.

We would argue that the very first sign that creation has fallen from its first purpose is not a corruption of sexuality, but rather the sign that things have gone askew: Adam and Eve are afraid and anxious to be with God. No longer do they “know” God, themselves, or each other in the way they did. There is a loss of the deep intimacy that was known to them before, resulting in feeling naked for the first time. Created to be in communion, they are now fraught with being alone and disconnected.

 The way paragraph three is written carries implications of the nature of God. We would offer a different viewpoint. What if God comes searching for Adam and Eve, much as a parent would, with much love and concern? Thus, God is seeking and asking, all for the sake of relationship with them. We have difficulty with the conclusion, “The connection between disordered sexuality and the curse of disobedience runs like a thread throughout this passage.” Again, we contest that if you begin with “disordered sexuality” as the premise, you will indeed see it everywhere. We would offer that the trust and intimacy they had known with God and each other is broken; Adam and Eve cannot see God as God is anymore. God, committed to His children, will do everything to make sure the relationship remains and grows.

In paragraph 7 (p. 20) we find it very problematic that within the created a list of various “immoralities”, premarital sex or divorce or cohabitation is somehow equated with sexual assault. Sexual assault is a form of abuse and we would ask that you differentiate these, to respect and honour those who have suffered sexual assault. It is troubling to read that Christians are called to “flee *all such* sexual immorality” after the list is given. For example, couples that we know who have wrestled with divorce, while seeking God and trying to find their way with the mind of Christ, are categorized into walking according to the mind of the world, and not the mind of Christ.

To summarize, we take issue with the views in this section on the “Fall” as it begins with the premise that God is punitive. Our understanding is that in turning from God in the garden, humanity began to lose its knowledge of communion and intimacy with God, thereby creating and suffering the effects of a different and untrue narrative of separation. In addition, the categorizing of immoralities is unacceptable.

Section XIII—Homosexuality: Pastoral Care (pg. 114)

This section begins with two personal stories. Again, for each story that may point to the good work being done in a CRC, this report could easily be including stories about those who have been hurt and have walked away from the church and/or God as a result of how they have been treated in the church. Where are those voices and why are they not included here?

A Word to Congregations (p. 114)

We agree that the word repentance will need to be oft repeated and that the promotion of change from homosexual to heterosexual is erroneous and has perpetuated overwhelming harm. Under “Teaching” (p. 115), what is not written but implied is that for homosexual persons to act upon their sexual desire will always be considered wrong in the CRC as the church continues to reject LGBTQ+ monogamous relationships, thus limiting the full expression of their love. The “practical advice” encourages all members to accept one another, yet ends with the personal story of “Han,” in which it is evident that full acceptance is nowhere on the horizon.

A word to church leaders (page 117)

Firstly, we would caution instructing “healing prayer teams” to deal with the hurt and shame of sexual abuse, but would rather healing prayer would be seen as part of a treatment plan originating with professionals trained in healing the trauma. We would also suggest that the over-preponderance of stories in this report of same sex couples living together in celibacy may be representationally inaccurate and this in itself adds to the “weariness” of our LGBTQ+ brothers and sisters.

Secondly, our local church is learning to be proactive, both in seeking to develop relationships with same sex believers and in determining our response to potential scenarios. However, we would also advocate that we desperately need leadership to develop relationships with LGBTQ+ persons who are not called to celibacy and who desire a same-sex marriage.

Further, we cannot begin to explain how inappropriate it would be, in terms of inclusion, to hold a special service as suggested on page 119, in order to confess the ““hypocrisy in singling out same-sex sexual practice as sinful while remaining silent about other sexual sins” such as pornography”. Again, it is the combining of these acts—one possibly desiring a consensual, monogamous, love-affirming relationship and the other built upon, as this report acknowledges, masculine domination and violence—that is inappropriate. We strongly believe that such a service would offer neither inclusion nor healing.

Finally, we would address the section entitled “A word to church members who are attracted to the same sex (page 122).”

Yes, we are all made in the image of God, and have great value just as we are. As well, God desires to free us from the guilt and shame we have inflicted upon ourselves and that has been inflicted upon us. Are the conclusions in this report enabling this? Our deepest concern in this “word” to same-sex attracted persons is the statement “Most longtime Jesus-followers also describe a lessening of the power of their same-sex attraction as they seek holiness…some also find themselves attracted to an opposite-sex friend…and they are able to marry.” (p. 123). Again, the report has stated that we cannot encourage ex-gay ministries and yet this mindset continues to not only be promoted, but to offer the false expectation that people can change their attractions through faith in Jesus. It also encourages marriage with opposite sex friends as the only acceptable way forward. Frankly, this section on pastoral care exemplifies the fact that the church has not moved beyond the ex-gay mindset, which is significantly problematic for us.

**Conclusion**

Within the pages of this report, we do not see evidence of the many LGBTQ+ persons who continue to be maligned in their desire for human intimacy. “Nothing about us, without us, is for us” has been a useful guiding principle in other spheres when composing any belief system or structure to be implemented, and it needs to be applied in studies of this kind. Despite some members having more theological education than others, God speaks to and is imaged in every human being. Secondly, while humanity’s actions have caused division and separation from our God, we would strongly argue that this is not a separation of soul and spirit from our Creator but rather a devastating misconception of division, into which enter shame and domination (among a host of other issues). We profess our belief in the grace of a God from whom none of us has ever been or can ever be separated. Finally, we lament the further division within the CRC that will result due to this report. Have we not learned from a racist history and from the “women’s issue” that long held interpretations of scripture must evolve to continue to speak life and grace? We lament the many voices of healing that will no longer, in good conscience hold leadership positions as well as the loss of the wisdom and beauty of those members who will continue to leave the denomination if this report is approved. Thus, we oppose recommendations B, D, E and F.

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