

Lord's Day 41 Overture
Church of the Savior CRC
South Bend, Indiana

We, the Council of Church of the Savior CRC, overture Classis Holland to overture Synod to reverse Synod 2022's decision to interpret the word "unchastity" in Q&A 108 of the Heidelberg Catechism as including "homosexual sex."¹

Grounds:

This decision effectively makes the Christian Reformed Church's position on homosexuality internally incoherent. It places Report 42 from the Committee to Study Homosexuality² (hereafter "the 1973 report") in opposition to Synod 2022's interpretation of Lord's Day 41 of the Heidelberg Catechism, and Synod 2022's interpretation of Lord's Day 41 in opposition to the 1973 report.³

Background:

The 1973 report makes a distinction between homosexuality (as an orientation) and homosexualism (homosexual activity, that is, engaging in "explicit sexual acts with persons of the same sex"⁴).⁵ According to the 1973 report, having a homosexual orientation (a condition often or always beyond one's control) is not a sin, while engaging in homosexual activity (i.e., by having homosexual sex) is a sin. This has been an important distinction for the CRC, as it seeks to support people who identify as LGBTQ while not condoning behaviors that scripture seems to condemn.

The 1973 report acknowledges the difficulty of the same-sex oriented person, who has desires for sexual fulfillment with a person of the same sex, but who is unable to have those desires fulfilled in a biblically justifiable way. A handful of quotations will illustrate this point:

"The direction of the homosexual's desires is not to be regarded as merely physical attraction. His desires cover the whole range of the rich interpersonal relations associated with the heterosexual form of sexuality, including love, understanding, friendship, the desire to belong to someone and to develop one's humanity in constant companionship with another human being. What is different for the homosexual is that these feelings are experienced with respect to a person of the same sex" (p. 612).

¹ Acts of Synod 2022, p. 922.

² https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/1973_report_homosexuality.pdf.

³ In fact, since the decision of the most recent Synod takes priority, Synod 2022 overturned Synod 1973 on this matter, all the while purporting to be in agreement with it.

⁴ P. 612.

⁵ P. 613.

“The homosexual, as constitutionally predisposed to erotic attraction to members of the same sex, bears the disorder of our broken fallen world in his person” (p. 623).

“We must now consider the problem of the homosexual who is in the unhappy dilemma of not being able to marry because of his homosexuality, but at the same time experiences all the desires and drive for sexual fulfillment that brings the heterosexual to marriage” (p. 627).

“A homosexual, on the other hand, like almost all human beings, has a need for the fulfillment of sexual relationships. For him not to have sex relations is to be deprived of that which his body craves, a deprivation of which he is constantly aware. He therefore lives in a circle of frustration caused by unfulfilled physical desires and the unfulfilled need for interpersonal love and companionship” (p. 628).

“What then do we say to the homosexual who cannot relate to a member of the opposite sex but at the same time is ‘afame with passion?’” (p. 628).

These representational quotations come from disparate places in the 1973 report, but they all illustrate the same point: the same-sex oriented person has sexual desire for a person of the same sex which cannot be fulfilled. The mind and body desire and crave something that cannot (or at least should not) be had. What is repeatedly made clear in the report, however, is that *the desire is not the sin*.⁶ The same-sex oriented person is not culpable for having the desires (a condition he or she may have been born with), but only for acting on them.

Synod 2022, however, has done away with this distinction, and contradicted this position set forth in the 1973 report. It did so by interpreting “unchastity” to include homosexual sex. Q&A 108 of the Heidelberg Catechism asks, “What does the seventh commandment teach us?” Answer: “That God condemns all unchastity, and that therefore we should thoroughly detest it and live decent and chaste lives, within or outside of the holy state of marriage.” Synod 2022 included “homosexual sex” among a list of things that fall under the description of “unchastity.”

The problem enters in when we consider the next question and answer, Q&A 109. “Does God, in this commandment, forbid only such scandalous sins as adultery?” Answer: “We are temples of the Holy Spirit, body and soul, and God wants both to be kept clean and holy. ***That is why God forbids all unchaste*** actions, looks, talk, ***thoughts, or desires***, and whatever may incite someone to them” (bold and italics mine). If homosexual sex is considered unchaste (as Synod 2022 declared), then by the logic of the Catechism, thoughts about or desires for homosexual sex are also condemned and forbidden.⁷ Thus, Synod 2022 has contradicted the 1973 report by making

⁶ Note the distinction between homosexuality as a “condition” (which is throughout the report associated with attractions and desires) and homosexualism as a “practice” (p. 613), and also the last paragraph on p. 613, which distinguishes between what one is and is not responsible for.

⁷ Ursinus makes this point very explicitly: “CHASTITY, in general, is a virtue contributing to the purity of body and soul, agreeing with the will of God, and shunning all lusts prohibited by God, all unlawful intercourse and inordinate

even the *desire* for homosexual sex (a necessary and obvious part of a homosexual orientation) forbidden by God.

On Synod 2022's interpretation of the Catechism, God forbids and condemns not just homosexual sex (Q&A 108), but homosexual desire (Q&A 109). In contradiction of the 1973 report, *the desire itself is now a sin*, forbidden by God and condemned along with "all unchastity," whether acted upon (Q&A 108) or desired (Q&A 109).⁸ What the 1973 report gave with the right hand, Synod 2022 took away with the left.

The CRC position on homosexuality has become, as of Synod 2022, inconsistent and incoherent. The 1973 report contradicts the decision of Synod 2022, and the decision of Synod 2022 contradicts the 1973 report.⁹ Logically speaking, one cannot *both* agree with the 1973 report *and* consider "unchastity" in Q&A 108 to include homosexual sex. For this reason, Synod should reverse Synod 2022's decision to interpret the word "unchastity" in Q&A 108 of the Heidelberg Catechism to include "homosexual sex."

Potential Objections:

- 1) "Desire" in Q&A 109 indicates lustful or excessive desire, as opposed to natural or "normal" desire.

Answer: The German word in the original text does not carry the connotation of lustful or excessive desire. It means much the same as the English word "desire," which can be used to indicate desire for positive things, or negative ones, depending on the context.

- 2) There is a distinction to be made between same-sex "orientation," same-sex "attraction," and same-sex "desire," such that Q&A 109 treats "desire" but not "orientation" or "attraction."

Answer: Such distinctions fall apart upon scrutiny, based on common sense and common usage of the terms. See, for example, how these terms blur together in the Human Sexuality

copulation in connection with all the desires, causes, effects, suspicions, occasions, &c., which may lead thereto, whether in holy wedlock or in a single life" ([Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism](#), p. 921). It is abundantly clear that Ursinus intends to condemn both homosexual desire and homosexual sex, over against the 1973 report.

⁸ Note the church in California that in May 2022 disaffiliated from the CRC in part over the "sinfulness of desire," concluding that "the [same-sex] attraction (desire) itself is sinful, and not only behaviors arising from it." If they had remained in the CRC another month, they would have found their views very much at home - indeed, now confessional - in the CRC. (See

<https://www.thebanner.org/news/2022/05/historic-california-congregation-disaffiliates-from-the-crc>.)

⁹ Given that the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality (whose conclusions led to Synod 2022's decision) was supposed to be in agreement with the 1973 report, this overture must of necessity call into question all the recommendations made by that committee. Not only did this committee show itself not to be in agreement with the 1973 report, it went so far as to directly contradict it (all the while claiming to uphold it), and succeeded in overturning the CRC's long-held position on homosexuality that the 1973 report laid out.

*Report itself: “There is no sin in being **attracted** to the same sex. We only sin if we act on our sexual **attractions**” (p. 93); “although Scripture condemns homosexual sex, it does not condemn people who are **attracted** to the same sex...In the world’s eyes it is outrageous to expect those who are **attracted** to the same sex not to express those **desires** in a sexual relationship” (p. 113). See also the definitions provided in the 1973 report: “Sexuality” is “...the **desire** to give and receive intimacy...” and “homosexuality” is “the condition in which an adult’s sexuality is directed to his own sex” (p. 611). A “homosexual” is “an adult who is motivated by a definite preferential **erotic attraction** to members of the same sex” (p. 613). See also the quote in note 8, where desire and attraction are equated, and distinguished from behavior.*

- 3) Synod 2022 and the HSR claim to uphold the 1973 position. They did not intend to forbid or condemn homosexual desire or attraction, only homosexual sex.

Whether or not they intended it, that is in fact what they did. The context of Lord’s Day 41 and the progression of Q&A 108 followed by Q&A 109 allow for no other reasonable conclusion.

In summary: The 1973 report laid out a groundbreaking and gracious position. Those who experienced same-sex attraction and desire were assured that they were not under God’s condemnation simply for having those attractions and desires, nor was their “condition” somehow forbidden by God; it was only specific actions done by choice that were forbidden. Tragically, Synod 2022 has obliterated this distinction, condemning not only the actions done by choice (Q&A 108), but by logical consequence forbidding even the desires that lie behind them (Q&A 109). It is our heartfelt plea, as office bearers in the Christian Reformed Church, that we return to the gracious stance of the 1973 report, and not be confessionally obligated to hold the position that God condemns and forbids same-sex desire.

Respectfully submitted,



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