

Human Sexuality

Chair: Aaron Vriesman
Reporter: Steven Zwart

Overtures

I. Grateful Acknowledgement:

We begin with heartfelt gratitude and affirmation of the collaborative efforts of the whole of Advisory Committee 7 which permitted a broad, collective effort to ensure every voice was heard and provide a context to explore the breadth of the weighty material before us.

With such acknowledgement we note that though the motions of both reports will differ, there are many shared concerns from the entirety of the committee.

The committee, with reflective humility in the pursuit of clarity in the matters before us, notably wrestled with the conclusive, unprecedented language of Synod 2022, specifically “therefore, this interpretation has confessional status” when referring to the “interpretation of (a) confession” related to defining “unchastity” in Heidelberg Catechism, Q & A 108.

II. Preamble to Majority Report

Our Biblical and confessional identity as the CRCNA serves both a foundational and unifying purpose amongst its assemblies, institutions, and congregants. We appeal to these fundamental trademarks both in times of certainty but also in crisis, in order to provide an essential connectedness and accountability so that we may be one as Jesus prayed.

The decision regarding the “confessional status” of the definition of “unchastity” from Synod 2022 revealed a crisis of necessity years in the making.

Following the Report on Homosexuality from 1973, encouragements and admonitions were put forth to shape a shared journey with those who wrestled with this issue, encouraging shared space yet guiding the church to hold fast to God’s Word in its admonitions.

What we are learning following Synod’s decision in 2022 to clarify our confessional identity regarding human sexuality is that, though the 1973 report gave biblically-rooted guidance to the church regarding care for those who are same-sex attracted, the implementation of that care failed on many levels.

Many of the overtures submitted to Synod 2023 and forwarded to Advisory Committee 7 noted references to misapplied discipline or misunderstandings related to interacting with same-sex attracted members, uncharitable bad faith efforts towards mutual accountability, examples of marginalization or even expulsion from the worshipping community in the absence of love and discipleship. The net result of 50+ years of failure in this arena resulted in far too many, who identify as LGBTQ+, to be left out, pushed out, or even worse, abused emotionally and spiritually by confessing Christ-followers. This is further complicated by church-wide collective failure to repent of all sexual sins, such as but not limited to pornography and extra-marital sexual sins.

To this end, we detest any misuse of the scriptures and confessions which are an abomination before God and an affront to the witness of Jesus Christ.

We believe the declaration of the definition of “unchastity” in the Human Sexuality Report as an “interpretation of a confession” and therefore having “confessional status”, was not a maligned attempt to reinforce the failures of our denomination but rather to call the whole church to “radical obedience” to Christ—both in holding to His Word and in the manner by which we journey together – ALL together. The depth and breadth of lament and pastoral care guidance in the HSR speaks to such intent.

When appealing to “confessional status”, we believe it is a humble acknowledgement by the HSR and Synod that the role of “confessions” in our identity is useful and instructive when adhering to the truth of Scripture and in its Christ-centered application.

Practically speaking, right use of the confessions through discipline and discipleship results in more room for growth, humble conversations, and the ability to ask honest and fair questions while we all continue to wrestle with our responses, not just to issues surrounding human sexuality but all areas of our walk with God. Such discipleship is a lifelong process as we seek to place all areas of our lives under the Lordship of Christ.

This goes to the heart of our recommendation. We humbly acknowledge institutions, interpretations, or confessional implementations cannot change hearts. But lives lived fully devoted to God’s Word, making good use of our creeds and confessions distinctive to our denominational identity, and sacrificial obedience to Jesus Christ—can serve as a catalyst to own our failures, deal rightly and humbly with our sin, hold each other mutually accountable in ways that lead to growth in faith in Christ Jesus, and practically provide tangible means through church discipline, Biblical discipleship and even through gravamina towards the oneness of the church Christ prayed for in John 17.

III. Recommendations:

- A. That Synod include this background statement in the official Acts of Synod 2023.

Grounds:

1. Without this background, we fear that misuse of the Human Sexuality Report may continue with improper and inconsistent emphasis.

- B. That Synod not accede to Overture 21C.

Grounds:

1. Synod 2022 gave due process according to Synodical Rules of Procedure to the matter of the Human Sexuality Report and its conclusions without any decisions ruling the declaration “confessional status” out of order, leaving such a declaration in place.
 - a. In accordance with the Acts of Synod 1976, Synods have the ability to interpret what the confessions teach. Note: “No one is free to decide for himself 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.” (Acts of Synod 1976, C. 3. a. 3, page 69; Church Order Art. 5 of the Supplement, A. 3., page 15.)
2. The theological and biblical components of the Human Sexuality Report, approved by Synod 2019, were before the churches for three years, giving the churches

significant “opportunity to consider the advisability of the proposed changes” (Church Order 47) prior to Synod 2022.

3. This overture does not contain “sufficient and new grounds” (Church Order Art 31) to reverse Synod 2022’s decisions.
- C. That synod consider this our response to overtures 16, 18, 19, 20, 23, 24, 29, 30, 46, 77, and communication 4.
- D. That synod not accede to Overture 40D.

Grounds:

- a. This overture essentially calls for the CRCNA to redo the approved and adopted work of the Human Sexuality Report.
- b. Synod 2022 settled the questions of theological position and moved the denomination towards following the pastoral care guidelines of the HSR.

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