

Calvin University
December 10, 2020

Dear President LeRoy and members of the Confessional Commitments and Academic Freedom (CCAF) Committee,

We, the undersigned faculty and staff of Calvin University, write to you in response to the report that was recently released by the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality. We have a number of grave concerns about the report, if ultimately adopted by Synod, and its potential impact on Calvin as a Christian liberal arts university as described by our Vision 2030. Of primary concern are the report's conclusions stating that prohibitions of "homosexual sex already have confessional status," that homosexual sex "threaten[s] a person's salvation," and that the failure to call people in same-sex relationships "to repentance is ... acting like a false church" (p. 148). The report's central claim appears to be at odds with Calvin's own Confessional Commitment and Academic Freedom document, according to which "it is problematic to assert that a topic like homosexuality is either confessional or not" (p. 21). The report insufficiently engages with relevant scholarship from our disciplines, leading to a biased view of the theological, scriptural, and scientific basis for the report. The discussions of gender identity and sexual orientation lack the scientific and hermeneutic rigor and accuracy of prevailing peer-reviewed scholarship and thereby have the potential to compromise Calvin's academic reputation. In sum, the report and its potential adoption by Synod could undermine the academic freedom of faculty and our standing as a reputable academic institution in the Reformed tradition.

Also of significant concern is the matter of faculty compliance with the Covenant for Faculty Members. Faculty members who have assented to the Covenant have done so when there was no claim that views on same-sex marriage and gender identity were confessional in nature. We would not want our assent to the Covenant to suggest, retroactively, that we support such a claim. Adoption of the report's claims by Synod could place many of us in noncompliance with the Covenant for Faculty Members and the Handbook for Teaching Faculty.

Adoption of the report's claims regarding confessional status would cause harm to our Reformed community by severely impairing staff and faculty's ability to care for our LGBTQ+ students in the way that our conscience dictates and the scholarship supports. While staff are not required to sign the Covenant for Faculty Members, some would consider working for an institution for whom the report was afforded confessional status a violation of conscience. Thus, it would become harder to attract and retain faculty, staff, and students.

Finally, the report's adoption and its declaration that issues of sexual orientation and gender identity are confessional and matters of salvation would be playing into the

narrow culture wars' conception of orthodoxy and detract from our larger Christian mission at a time when we want to lead, not just nationally, but globally as agents of Renewal.

While we understand that the potential impact of the report, if adopted by Synod, will be discussed by the CCAF subcommittee of PSC, we urge you to also communicate with the Council of Delegates (COD) of the CRCNA that

1. adoption of this report by Synod has the potential to negatively impact Calvin University's status as an academic institution;
2. adoption of the report by Synod has the potential to harm Calvin University's Vision 2030 goals;
3. Calvin University plans to continue to support its LGBTQ+ students by fully including them in the life of the University, and plans to continue to support staff and faculty as they care for our LGBTQ+ students in the way that their conscience dictates;
4. Calvin plans to continue to protect its faculty and staff on these issues especially in their scholarship, teaching, and service.

Believing strongly in Calvin University and its mission, we offer our continued service and scholarly expertise as the discussion of this report progresses.

Sincerely,
Emily Helder, Psychology
Clarence Joldersma, Education
Kevin Timpe, Philosophy
Linda Naranjo-Huebl, English