

November 17, 2009

Dr. Joel Beeke  
Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary  
2965 Leonard Street NE  
Grand Rapids, MI 49525

Dear Dr. Beeke:

This letter is in follow up of the email I sent to you on November 12, 2009 relating to Mr. Ray Lanning, a copy of which is enclosed. I would appreciate your patience as I convey my concerns as well as make inquiry of you. Your responsibilities are many, so I understand the difficulty in making time for this. Furthermore, I fully acknowledge that your knowledge in reformed and puritan theology far surpasses my own, so I can appreciate a justifiable reluctance to spend time with what I write when many weighty matters call for your attention. But I think this matter deserves your attention, even if I am a poor messenger of it.

There are special occasions which call us to reevaluate the direction we are headed. I would submit that this is such a special occasion for you and the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary (PRTS), along with Mr. Lanning. History is littered with seminaries that started with the best of intentions but went heretical because they failed rigorously to uphold and maintain confessional subscription to their confessional standards along the way. It often starts by allowing faculty with what are deemed minor deviations from the confessional standards. But all too often, having tolerated these, the seminary tolerates faculty with greater and greater deviations from sound doctrine. And over course of time the institution strays further and further from the truth. The doctrinal boundaries become unclear, and so they are readily passed over with increasing momentum.

Although the website of PRTS indicates that PRTS adheres to the original Westminster Standards and Three Forms of Unity, I fear reality differs from this stated position. As one reviews the list of visiting faculty of PRTS, it is clear that many are not men that adhere to the original Westminster Standards and Three Forms of Unity. One should not expect men who do not adhere to the confessional standards to uphold and maintain in their teaching positions consistent with those standards. To take just one obvious example, PRTS's Baptist faculty are going to disagree with the original Westminster Standards and Three Forms of Unity on a host of issues, including the doctrines of the sacraments, church government, worship, covenants and oaths, the civil magistrate, the relation of the Old and New Testaments, etc. When one allows faculty who so disagree with the confessional standards to teach at the seminary, it is undermining one's professed confessional stance.

But I even fear that disagreement with the original Westminster Standards and Three Forms of Unity extends further. To give but one example, when Mr. Nate Eshelman was a seminarian, he indicated on the reformed faith and worship internet list that PRTS professors by and large disagree with the Establishment Principle. If true, this would mean there is widespread disagreement among many of

the faculty with the following statements in the original Westminster Standards and Three Forms of Unity:

“...The civil magistrate may not assume to himself the administration of the Word and sacraments, or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven:464 yet he has authority, and it is his duty, to take order that unity and peace be preserved in the Church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire, that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed, all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed, and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administrated, and observed.465“ (Westminster Confession, Chapter 23)

“...And the government's task is not limited to caring for and watching over the public domain but extends also to upholding the sacred ministry, with a view to removing and destroying all idolatry and false worship of the Antichrist; to promoting the kingdom of Jesus Christ; and to furthering the preaching of the gospel everywhere; to the end that God may be honored and served by everyone, as required in God's Word.“ (Belgic Confession, Article 36)

Is it the case that some even of the full time faculty at PRTS disagree with these confessional positions?

Another area of concern would relate to the doctrine of scripture. The Free Reformed Church synod in 2004 permitted use of the New King James Version in its pulpits, a clear case of backtracking from the received text position, as cogently shown by the Trinitarian Bible Society's "Quarterly Record" articles on the NKJV. Obviously, the Free Reformed Church supplies teachers to PRTS, along with other NAPARC denominations which similarly have retreated from upholding the received text. Do all the faculty at PRTS uphold the received text view, or do a number sympathize with the critical text view? This is a critical issue, because the reformed doctrine of sola scriptura relies upon God's providential preservation of His infallible scriptures for the church from generation to generation (Westminster Confession, Chapter 1).

Or to give another area, the original Westminster Standards simply do not allow the looser applications of the regulative principle of worship which are tolerated by most of the denominations participating in PRTS and the views associated with them (Westminster Confession, Chapter 21).

But now we come to the case of Mr. Lanning. He is on the faculty of PRTS and does not agree with the confessional standards as they relate to human sexuality (as well as other issues). I have enclosed an outline of Sabbath lessons he taught publicly on human sexuality. In that series he taught that homosexual desires are not necessarily sinful, and he suggested that self-professed homosexuals should be allowed in the communicant membership. There is good reason to believe that he has not moved from these positions, which is why the matter is currently under review of a presbytery of the RPCNA after so long a time. But Mr. Lanning's position is inconsistent with the Westminster Larger Catechism question 139:

“The sins forbidden in the seventh commandment, besides the neglect of the duties required,780 are... sodomy, and all unnatural lusts;783...”

We should not be fooled that when one holds to an error such as this that it does not affect other areas of one's religious thought, practice and teaching. For example, if homosexual desires are not necessarily sinful, then either a pharisaical interpretation of sin is true, or else homosexual civil unions are justified. And the implications can even be more profound. (In my opinion, the RPCNA will have difficulty in singling out Mr. Lanning for his doctrinal deviations in a manner that is fair and just, because they tolerate a fair amount of other deviations by officers to their confessional standards.)

So how far will PRTS allow doctrinal deviations among its faculty? I note that the Heritage Reformed and Free Reformed denominations in recent years have joined NAPARC, which also tolerates significant doctrinal deviations among its member denominations, even to the extent denials by church officers of such doctrines as justification through faith alone and the regulative principle of worship are tolerated among some of the member denominations, such as the OPC and PCA. NAPARC advertises that its member churches hold to the Westminster Standards and the Three Forms of Unity, but the reality is that they hold to some very different versions of them and with forms of subscription widely varying. This is not a way to maintain the church as the "pillar of truth" God calls it to be.

These then are my questions and concerns, which I will seek to follow up on. I would appreciate your thoughtful consideration of them. It seems to me that Mr. Lanning's deviation waves a red flag, raising the question of doctrinal subscription to the confessional standards of the PRTS faculty: will PRTS enforce subscription among its faculty or will it follow a latitudinarian course with no clear reformed doctrinal boundaries?

Sincerely,



J. Parnell McCarter

cc: Mr. Ray Lanning

Lesson for Sabbath, October 14, 2007

## The Seventh Commandment

(Larger Catechism, QQ. 137-139)

1. What is the basis of the Seventh Commandment?

*Answer:* The seventh commandment is based on the divine institution of human marriage, and the marriage covenant, a reflection of the great mystery of the bond and union between God and His people, and between Christ and the church; hence the commandment primarily concerns fidelity, or keeping faith with one's marriage partner.

2. But does not the catechism seem to speak rather about chastity and temperance?

*Answer:* Indeed the catechism does speak chiefly about chastity, watchfulness, temperance, and even addresses peer group pressures and dressing modestly; and in so doing it reminds us of the habits and behaviors which support faithfulness to one's marriage covenant; but by this failure to identify this foremost requirement of the commandment, the catechism falls short of answering its own question (Q. 138).

3. Does the catechism promote or require marriage for all persons?

*Answer:* No, the catechism does not promote universal marriage, at least not among Christians; rather, following the line of the apostle Paul, it speaks of marriage as a concession to the human weakness of "those who have not the gift of continency," or the ability to abstain from sexual intercourse; yet the catechism does not fall into the opposite error of requiring or exalting the celibate or single life as a norm for Christians.

4. Does the catechism address homosexuality?

*Answer:* Not directly, for like the Bible, the catechism was written long before the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when this word and its counterpart, heterosexuality, were coined to describe same-sex or opposite-sex attraction or orientation as a fixed aspect of individual human personality and psychology.

5. Yet does not the catechism does forbid sodomy?

*Answer:* The catechism does indeed forbid sodomy, but the term has been used very widely in Christian history, and may be intended to include all forms of sexual intercourse deemed unlawful among Christians.

6. What was the sin of Sodom?

*Answer:* According to Ezekiel 16:49 & 50, the sin or iniquity of Sodom was "pride, fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me: therefore I took them away as I saw good.

Lesson for Sabbath, October 21, 2007

## The Seventh Commandment & Homosexuality

(Larger Catechism, QQ. 137-139)

The subject of homosexuality is complex and merits careful examination. Christians have been guilty of simplistic thinking about homosexuality. There has been a lack of careful definition of terms, a failure to make important distinctions, and a surprising reluctance to re-examine the exegesis and conclusions the Reformed churches inherited from medieval Roman Catholicism regarding homosexuality. It would be impossible in the brief time we have today to address this subject thoroughly. At best, we can only look at the chief points of controversy, in an attempt to contribute to a better understanding of current research and debate, and to come to a clearer understanding of what the Bible teaches.

1. Is homosexuality an orientation, that is, a feature or component of personal psychology and identity? Or is it only a practice or lifestyle into which anyone may lapse or be introduced, under favorable conditions?
2. Is all homosexuality the same? Is there a difference between those who claim to be homosexual by orientation, that is, sexually attracted only to persons of the same sex, and those whose homosexuality appears to be only situational or “experimental” (Romans 1)?
3. If homosexuality is an orientation, is it (a) natural or innate, (b) imposed by faulty nurture, or (c) acquired by choice?
4. If it is natural or innate, is it something defective or pathological, requiring treatment or correction, or simply a variation in the human species, subject to regulation by the law of God just as heterosexuality is?
5. If it is imposed by faulty nurture, who is responsible for the wrong or fault involved? Should the onus of responsibility fall on the victims of this faulty nurture?
6. If it is acquired by choice, is it another form of addictive behavior, for which a course of reparative therapy may be prescribed? Is there any difference between addictive behaviors, for which one should seek rehabilitation, and sins from which one must repent?
7. What specific forms of homosexual practice does the Bible condemn?

*Answer:* The relatively few references to homosexual practice in the Bible fall into two categories: cases involving male prostitution, often connected with fertility cults (Lev. 18:11 & 20:13, Deut. 23:17, I Ki. 14:24; I Cor. 6:9, I Ti. 1:9), and cases involving situational or “experimental” homosexual practice, such as that of the antediluvian idolaters described by Paul in Romans 1. The Hebrew word translated “sodomite” is really *qadesh*, meaning “consecrated.” The word “nature” in Romans 1 refers to the innate or “inborn” givens of human identity, not to the so-called “laws of nature” or “Mother Nature.” The word “effeminate” (I Cor. 6:9) could also be translated “lovers of luxury,” or “self-indulgent ones.” Jude 7 refers to human beings seeking sex with embodied angels (“other flesh”).

Lesson for Sabbath, October 28, 2007

## The Seventh Commandment & Homosexuality

(Larger Catechism, QQ. 137-139)

The subject of homosexuality is complex and merits careful examination. Christians have been guilty of simplistic thinking about homosexuality. There has been a lack of careful definition of terms, a failure to make important distinctions, and a surprising reluctance to re-examine the exegesis and conclusions the Reformed churches inherited from medieval Roman Catholicism regarding homosexuality. From what has been said so far, the following conclusions may be drawn:

1. We as Christians lack knowledge and understanding of homosexuality, as we do in regard to many other facets of human psychology and behavior. We need to be better informed, and we need to encourage further research and reflection on this subject. There are many questions being asked, but comparatively few good answers at present.
2. In particular, we must look carefully at what the Bible does say about homosexuality. It appears that many translations of the Bible suffer from a bias in translating that imposes on the Bible ideas not in the Hebrew or Greek itself. Examples: "Sodomites" in Deut. 23:17 (KJV) and other places; various usages of "homosexual" in I Cor. 6:9 (See NIV, NEB, Living Bible, TEV). It is bearing false witness to represent God's Word as saying things it does not in fact say.
3. We need to remember that as Reformed Christians we confess the sufficiency of Scripture in terms of "all things necessary for God's own glory, man's salvation, faith and life." We should not be surprised that there are many things about our world and ourselves that are not addressed, or not exhaustively addressed, in the Bible. Man's dominion over the earth implies the need to inquire into the nature of things, to seek understanding, and to live wisely. The Christian faith has nothing to fear from the fruits of genuinely scientific research and philosophical reflection.
4. We also need to acknowledge that the Christian church has often turned a blind eye, or even taken a part in, the many injustices done to homosexual persons, allowing them to be deprived of or denied their dignity as human beings, their rights as citizens, and the claims they have on us as our neighbors, under the terms of the Golden Rule.
5. In particular, we must repent of the sin of using homosexual persons as "scapegoats," blaming a rather small part of the general population for the many ills of society at large. Prominent Christian leaders have been guilty of this sin, and prominent conservative politicians have freely and cynically exploited it for their own purposes, to whip up emotion and get out the evangelical vote on election days.
6. Finally, we need to ask what the gospel means for homosexual persons, at least for those who wish to break with what is known as the "homosexual lifestyle," and who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and wish to follow Him, walking in a new and godly life. Is there no place for them in the church? Must they hide their true selves and pretend to be something they are not? Must they seek to be "cured," and claim to be "cured," of homosexuality, when in fact they are not? Is the gospel promise of forgiveness and reconciliation to God only for "straight" people?

**Subject: inquiry**

**From: info@puritans.net**

**Date: Thu, Nov 12, 2009 6:31 am**

**To: jrbeeke@aol.com**

**Dear Dr. Beeke:**

**I think it is important for the leadership of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary to be aware of the theological positions of its faculty. Accordingly, I am sending you this email.**

**According to the webpage <http://www.puritanseminary.org/academics/faculty.php> , included among the faculty is Mr. Ray Lanning. As it indicates there:**

**"Rev. Ray Lanning serves as guest professor for all student practice preaching and in homiletics and liturgics. He also tutors in writing, public speaking, and other areas."**

**Are you and the leadership of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary aware of Mr. Lanning's controversial and un-Biblical views on human sexuality, specifically relating to sodomy/homosexuality?**

**He taught these views publicly in a Sabbath school series in his congregation many months ago and continues to adhere to the views then presented. The matter is currently under review of his presbytery of the RPCNA.**

**Thank you for your thoughtful attention to this matter, for the good of Mr. Lanning, those he teaches, and PRTS.**

**Sincerely,**

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