

“Same-Sex Relationships and the CRC”, by Gayla R. Postma, *The Banner*, October 12, 2020.

Nearly a half-century ago, Christian Reformed Church scholars (e.g., Woudstra, Hart, Olthuis, Smedes, Wolterstorff, *et al*) supported gay and lesbian Christians. In January, 1985, midway through his tenure as editor of *The Banner*, CRC’s monthly, Andrew Kuyvenhoven wrote to EC’s editor: “I have read your *Review* for a number of years and am thankful for all the work you devote to this topic and to those sufferers.” But these scholars’ wisdom is still resisted by CRC nay-sayers.

So, *The Banner*’s news editor, now retired, prepares readers for release of a still deficient report of the latest CRC Committee on Biblical Theology and Human Sexuality which claims to give “clear ethical guidance for what constitutes a holy and healthy Christian life” as the CRC approaches its 2021 Synod.

Postma states: “Synod 1973 also called members of the CRC to a very high standard of pastoral care for those who experience same-sex attraction, calling churches to encourage full participation from them in the same way that is expected of heterosexual people, including holding offices of elders, deacons, and pastors. Pastors were called to be informed about homosexuality and to call members and office bearers to the responsibility they bear toward same-sex-attracted persons in the church.” However, she rightly notes: “It turns out that the CRC fell well short of the mark on pastoral care.”

*The Banner*, here, presents thoughts from three CRC heterosexuals and three CRC members who’re same-sex attracted. They’re asked about their biblical views of same-sex relationships and the CRC. Postma explains: “They are equally divided on wanting to see the CRC affirm same-sex marriage and wanting the CRC to reaffirm its traditional view of marriage”. This division of opinion resides within each of these three groups.

Jen Vander Heide, 36, and her wife, Sarah Jacobson, belong to Sherman Street CRC in Grand Rapids. “I am a child of this denomination. I grew up in Holland, Mich., going to Christian school, attending services twice on Sunday, and discussing the sermon with my grandfather during coffee time. I was a fourth-generation Calvin University graduate, and, after finishing graduate work, I took a teaching position there.” She says: “Being gay was not something I grew up wanting to be; for the first half of my life it was a source of deep shame. I hid it from those around me because the CRC taught that if I revealed who I was, I would live a life of aloneness and brokenness. When I finally came out in my late 20s, unable to carry the secret any longer, I went on a quest to try to understand what type of God would allow me to be gay. I was shattered and angry.” She says, “I searched the Scriptures ... listened to the debates ... none of the arguments satisfied my questions. I kept searching.” She’ll “always remember when I found John 10:10. There Jesus says: ‘I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.’ For me, this was the radical truth of the gospel. Jesus came to bring me life—a full life.” In contrast, “the CRC’s theological stance ... brings death, either physical or emotional, to LGBT people in our denomination.”

Vander Heide well notes: “The first thing that God called the new church to do was to include the Gentiles. This was hard for Peter. In Acts 10, God instructed him: ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean’ (v. 15).” She notes: “Jesus was clear that he came

for more people than the early Christians originally imagined. In John 10:16, Jesus tells us: ‘I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.’” She sensibly concludes, “Let us more fully become one flock in love.”

Leonard Vander Zee, 75, and his wife, Jeanne, belong to the Church of the Servant CRC in Grand Rapids. A retired pastor, he recalls: “CRC’s 1973 Synodical Report on Homosexuality appeared around the time I was just beginning as an ordained pastor. I saw the report as generally enlightened, especially its conclusion that homosexuality is an orientation rather than a perverse choice.” He adds: “Increasingly, however, the lives and experiences of real people began to alter my views. I could no longer see them abstractly as ‘homosexuals’ but as whole, loving, gifted human beings, many of them committed Christians.” He says, “The 1973 Report’s distinction between choice and orientation is not found in the Bible. In Romans 1:18-27, Paul describes human rebellion against God. ... Paul gives an example. ‘Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women’. Paul is condemning what historians say were typical homosexual relationships in his time that, often involved exploitation, pederasty, and sexual slavery. Paul was not being a homophobic bigot, but condemning widespread, perverse practices among the empire’s elite.” Vander Zee explains: “But these are not the same people we are talking about today, as the very language of the text shows. We are talking about baptized CRC members, not ‘godless’ people who ‘suppress the truth.’ They do not ‘exchange natural sexual relations’ but form relationships out of their sexual orientation, which is as natural to them as heterosexuality. Still, the 1973 Report demands that they remain celibate. But on what basis? Though Paul advocated celibacy for all unmarried Christians, he still acknowledged that not all are so gifted. Therefore, he wrote, ‘It is better to be married than to burn with passion’ (1 Cor. 7:8-9). Since God ordained marriage as the covenant commitment in which sex belongs, the real issue here is same-sex marriage. Not all of our gay and lesbian members are able to or desire to live celibate lives.” He objects to the CRC’s stacking the deck: “Unfortunately, Synod 2016 limited participation on the Committee to Articulate a Foundation Laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality to only those who agree with the 1973 report. Instead of sparking a real and open denominational discussion, the present committee can only defend our 50-year-old stance. We need an honest, open, and thorough new look at the biblical evidence and the contemporary situation on this issue. That will demand a longer journey of study and mutual engagement in an atmosphere of love, trust, and forbearance.”

