DO WE NEED TO “REVISIT” 1973?

Yes, no, maybe so. Yes, if this means we in the CRC must do a lot more to love and minister to homosexual persons as mandated by the 1973 Report. No, if this means changing our position that celibacy is God’s will for all people who are not married. Maybe so, if this means updating ourselves on discussions about homosexuality that have taken place since 1973.

I raise the question of reconsidering 1973 because a small but growing number of voices in the CRC are claiming that the only way we can really minister to our homosexual members is to loosen up on celibacy. If we update ourselves on recent discussions, they say, we will see that Guideline 3 of the 1973 Report was too restrictive, or at least that there are two legitimate opinions on this issue.

Perhaps we do need to update ourselves on recent discussions. But familiarity with the debates on biblical exegesis, hermeneutics, ethics, and the causes of homosexuality that have taken place during the past two decades will not lead to a new position on celibacy. In fact, it will strengthen the old one. Let me briefly outline why this is so, without getting into the details.

Common Arguments for Changing ’73

1. Some claim that new information about genetic or brain-functional causes of homosexual orientation weaken 1973’s conclusion about celibacy. But these causes have not yet been scientifically proven and are still controversial. And even if they turn out to be true, that will not change 73. The Report distinguishes between the orientation, which is usually involuntarily acquired and may be very difficult to modify, and the practice, which is a matter of choice and the will. It concludes that we ought not to blame people for their orientation.

Please see COVER ESSAY next page.

FEATURED ARTICLES

“Do we need to ‘Revisit’ 1973” - John Cooper

“Truth and Freedom” - David Holwerda

“The Case for Change” - Melvin D. Hugen

“Obliged to Support” - James A. De Jong
but should hold them responsible for their actions. No new evidence about involuntary causes of the orientation can change this position. All of us have involuntary desires to do what God does not want us to do. But that does not make acting on those desires involuntary or permissible.

Many have argued that Scripture does not forbid faithful, loving same-sex relationships because it does not even address them. They claim that the biblical texts only address homosexual rape, lust, promiscuity, and pagan religious practices. During the last ten years, however, a number of scholars have responded to these readings, demonstrating that such restricted interpretations are difficult to defend on standard exegetical grounds. If anything, the traditional position has emerged from this debate even stronger than before. There simply are not two equally valid readings of most of the biblical texts that refer to homosexual behavior.

Furthermore, defending Christian homosexual practice with this narrow reading of the texts is incompatible with standard Reformed hermeneutics. It ignores the analogy of Scripture—the cumulative teaching of Scripture on sexuality in general and on homosexual acts in particular. The analogy of Scripture is that sexual expression is intended for marriage as ordained by God. Ultimately the Bible rejects all other sexual relations. Therefore, even if it were never mentioned specifically, same-sex activity would be ruled out by implication. But in fact there is an explicit analogy of Scripture for homosexual relations. It is uniformly negative, whatever the particular social, cultural, or religious associations of the specific texts.

Using the analogy of Scripture, Reformed ethics attempts to discern the universal principles taught in the Bible and to distinguish them from applications of principles that might be limited: temporary, or culturally specific. Identification of these principles is what enables us to apply Scripture to contemporary situations and practices that the Bible does not specifically address: abortion, euthanasia, global economics, and many others. Using methods of Reformed hermeneutics and ethics, therefore, it is impossible to say that Scripture does not address the kind of homosexual activity envisioned by the voices for change in the position of the CRC.

Incidentally, the case for the ordination of women is quite different. It involves two analogies of Scripture: the equality of women and the subordination of women. The debate is over how they relate. Scripture speaks with only one voice about homosexual practice, however.

Some people defend the right to modify the CRC position on celibacy on the ground that homosexuality is not a confessional matter. But that is not quite true. The Heidelberg Catechism's treatment of the seventh commandment covers all of sexual morality as taught by Scripture. In fact Leviticus 18:30 (which alludes to the entire chapter) is listed as a reference. If Scripture warns against homosexual acts, then by implication the Catechism does too.

Faithful homosexual relationships are sometimes defended as "second best." Although celibacy is God's ideal, it is said, the church should accept the committed relationships of those who cannot attain it. But should the church then also permit such relationships for heterosexuals who wish to marry but cannot? It is true that a committed relationship is better than promiscuity. But that only makes it a lesser evil, not a lesser form of good.

Some appeal to the greatness of God's grace. If God can transform other tragedies and evils, even Jesus' death, into means of grace, why can't he do this with homosexuality? It is no doubt true that God's grace does not turn unjust capital punishment into a good thing. Scripture never implies that God's grace turns sin into acceptable behavior. God's grace is shown in forgiving us calling us to repentance, and enabling us to grow in obedience.

But perhaps homosexual practice is like adoption, some say, an unnatural relationship that grace can make redeemable. However, the analogy with adoption is not very close because caring for children something that God wills. Homosexual practice is morally compared to other kind of sexual activities that God forbids. Are they too possible channels of grace?

But what about the experience of committed Christian homosexual couples? Some of them are such beautiful Christians and so deeply spiritual in their relationships. Can we still say that their physical relationship is wrong? We can if Scripture is not experience, is the final authority. Experience can be deceptive. I once spoke with a loving and pious Reformed Christian who had helped several people voluntarily euthanize themselves after prayer, psalm-singing, and good-bye hugs. She assured me that this was a beautiful experience of God's gracious presence even in death. This illustrates why experience cannot be the final norm for faith and practice. By the same token, the compassion that we should feel for the suffering experienced by homosexual people, some of it caused by us fellow Christians, does not justify overturning biblical teaching.

This is a partial overview of how I think a new study of Guideline 3 would go. The arguments and evidence for both positions would be considered in detail. In the end
Which has priority — truth or freedom? Jesus says, "if you hold to my teaching, you are truly my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32). Truth sets human beings free. Our generation needs to hear the truth.

A Challenging Task

Truth can offend. Jesus spoke the truth and his generation was offended. Many were looking exclusively for political freedom to be seized if and when available. Jesus spoke of a captivity that exists even when politically free. He spoke the uncomfortable truth that all human beings are sinners. Consequently, freedom lies only in accepting Jesus, his deeds and his teaching, as the truth. The cross of Jesus Christ is absolutely necessary for genuine human freedom.

Our generation also is offended by talk about sin and "sin" has dropped out of its vocabulary. The more enlightened view is that behavior (good or bad) is determined either by outside influence or by internal genetic structure. Consequently, human beings are viewed more as helpless victims than as responsible moral agents. The word "sin", however, entails the truth that we are responsible for our conduct. In 1973, the famous psychiatrist, Dr Karl Menninger, published a book with the intriguing title, Whatever Became of Sin? By dropping the concept of sin and by negating individual responsibility for conduct, our culture, Menninger argued, was destroying the possibility and hope of freedom.

Besides "sin," our culture seems also willing to surrender the belief in universal truth or anyone's ability to know it. Truth is being reduced to personal opinion, shaped by one's class, gender, or race. All such "truths" are merely personal, relative, equally valid and binding on no one. Proclaiming in such a world that Jesus is absolutely essential for genuine freedom becomes an instance of religious intolerance and personal arrogance.

David E. Holwerda, Editor

Truth and Freedom

One reviewer of my book on Jesus and Israel expressed such a view. He was astonished that anyone in this post-holocaust era could still insist that Jesus is necessary also for the Jews. He berated me for not letting the Jews be Jews.

Proclaiming truth may give offense, but where truth is not spoken freedom is diminished.

Truth and Ideology

Life is complex and reality can be puzzling. Ideologies arise as human attempts to make sense out of these complexities. Politicians are easily attracted to an ideology because it eases decision making. One cannot know everything, so let the ideology determine the decision. But ideologies are always partial, one-sided human explanations which run the danger of ignoring inconvenient truths. When elevated to the level of an exclusive, universal world-view, ideologies become restrictive, erroneous, and oppressive.

The truth of Jesus is not an ideology. For the Jesus who speaks and identifies himself with the truth is also the pre-existent Word of God through whom all things were made.

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THE CASE FOR CHANGE

Identity

Realization of one’s same-sex orientation often leads to a gay self-identity. The community says “you are gay,” not as an adjective describing one aspect of one’s sexuality but as a noun, identifying who one is. The answer to the question all people ask “who am I?” is, for many homosexuals, “I am gay” or “I am lesbian.”

As all Christians know, the question “who am I?” is a deeply spiritual question. One that God addresses in the holy scripture. The answer may never be “I am a male, or American, or a doctor.” Although these may describe me and be some part of my identity, they are not who I truly am. Who I truly am is, I am a human being created by God, I am a child of God, I am a Christian. That is who I really and truly am. That is my deepest identity and it overshadows all other characteristics of me, it qualifies them all.

The first and in many ways the most significant change that God offers to all who struggle with a condition such as homosexuality is that this is not who you are. It is only something about you.

This change does not come easy, at least for many. The culture, the gay community, and even the church tend to reduce homosexual persons to their sexuality, relate to them in terms of their sexuality, and therefore powerfully communicate the message “this is who you are.”

The change to a different core identity can be crucial to all other changes, for the answer faith gives to the “who am I?” question shapes our relationships, our behaviors, and our expectations.

Vocation

The second spiritual question every person must answer is “what am I here for? What is the purpose of my life?” Again, this is an area of life in which significant change is possible for persons who are homosexual.

The realization of one’s same sex orientation carries with it pictures of closed doors: marriage, a family of my own, sometimes even a place within one’s family or church. Closed doors, all of them.

Discovering the multiple ways God expects the gay person to serve him is a significant part of the change that brings wholeness and health to homosexual persons. These include a person’s gifts for ministry and role in the church, a person’s citizenship and role in a community, the person’s occupation, her relationship to family and friends—all of the ways God calls each of us to serve him. A deep sense of vocation brings with it many other changes, including self-control and a healthy self-identity.

Temptation

Sexual thoughts, pictures and urges often trouble persons who are homosexual, even to the point of obsession. This can be especially true when the issues of identity and vocation are still unsettled. A lonely resistance against unremitting temptations is more than some can bear and they “fall into temptation.”

The Scripture teaches many useful things about temptations, useful also in dealing with sexual temptations:

“Because he (Jesus) himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted” Heb. 2:18

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.” Heb. 4:15

“So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall! No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand under it.” 1 Cor. 10:12,13

Christians can and do grow in their ability to resist temptations. They grow in their faith that in Christ all things are possible, they grow in their ability to discern and avoid situations in which temptation comes, they grow in forgiveness and the eradication of guilt and shame which undermine the ability to resist new temptations.

Self-control

The gift of self-control is necessary for all who aim at chastity in singleness. Otherwise, marry, says the apostle Paul. But what if marriage is not a possibility, and for many persons troubled with same sex attractions it is...
CHANG!

comes from God. He gives us all we need to resist temptation.

Unfulfilled sexual desire has often troubled the lives of saints. Self-control often comes through the spiritual disciplines, including prayer. But it also comes through a community of fellow believers in which one finds the emotional and spiritual intimacy that our sexuality is meant to lead us to. Isolation and loneliness aggravate desire and undermine self-control. A church community that gathers in the seekers, the troubled, and the tempted, a community that recognizes them as part of the body, that community engenders self-control and makes celibacy possible.

“Some people say...is not who you are”

Healing

This is what most people are thinking when they ask “Is change possible?” Can I change my sexual responses, my sexual attractions, my ability to become aroused be changed from same sex to opposite sex? And, therefore, is it possible for me to date, look forward to marriage, and have a family of my own.

The scriptures clearly tell us that Jesus came to heal as well as to preach the good news of the kingdom. Also, his disciples are sent out to heal as well as preach the gospel. However, he does not promise to heal everyone of every malady or condition that troubles them. In fact, he tells us the opposite. We shall all have afflictions, diseases, and eventually die. Yet everyone of us has been healed, often, in countless ways, but not always. We join the saints under the altar crying out “How long, O Lord?” How long before we are delivered from these bondages that handicap and restrict us?

So, what can we expect? Christian ministries, many of them associated with Exodus International, Box 77652, Seattle WA 98177, give testimony of many people who have experienced wondrous healing. Exodus International makes referrals to the nearest of their 85 ministries in North America (206) 784-7799). Also, psychotherapists, both Christian and non-Christian, give accounts of recovery and significant reorientation of sexual drives.

Again, not everyone. And, often not completely. When healing is defined as the ability to be sexually attracted to and aroused by persons of the opposite sex, to establish a healthy heterosexual preference, and to establish and maintain a heterosexual relationship, when healing is defined by these criteria, then psychologists and others who do such therapy consistently report a rate of healing from 33 1/3% to 50%.

Psychiatrists such as Dr. Irving Bieber, Dr. Judd Marmor, and Dr. Charles Socarides—already in the 1960’s reported recovery rates of one-third to one-half of those that seek reorientation. These rates correspond with the reports of Dr. Charles van den Aardweg, Dr. Elizabeth Moberly, Dr. Mansell Pattison and Dr. Joseph Nicolis, all of whom therapeutic research is from the 1980’s and 90’s. Dr. Wm. Masters and Virginia Johnson, reported a recovery rate of more than two-thirds of the eighty-one persons they treated, nearly all of whom maintained their reorientation upon testing six years later (Homosexuality in Perspective, 1979). But note, recovery or healing does not mean that these persons are never troubled by homosexual urges or fantasies. They lessen, sometimes dramatically, but healing is rarely total, just as with many other human conditions. However, it is real and it is common enough that persons who are homosexual and desire to be otherwise should seek therapists who are ready to do such therapy. In any case, ministries patterned on a recovery model help homosexual persons make those changes that are possible for them. For some it is significant reorientation. For others it is a change in self-identity, a deeper sense of vocation, and greater self-control. For all it can be a new understanding of the hope held out in 1 Cor. 8:14 of the new life in Christ “such as were some of you.”

COVER ESSAY cont.

COOPER

the position of 1973 would stand even more firmly than before, making dissent much more difficult to justify.

Should We Revisit 1973?

Should we revisit 1973? No, if that means weakening the norm of celibacy. Maybe, if that means elaborating and comparing the cases for both sides, thereby demonstrating and educating the CRC on the continuing validity of 1973. Yes, if that means going beyond reaffirmation of Guideline 3 to serious implementation of all the Guidelines of the Report. Yes, if it means actually loving and ministering to our homosexual brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ.

My worry about the voices calling for acceptance of committed homosexual relationships is not that they will gain legitimacy in the CRC. That’s just not going to happen. My concern is that they will continue to divert attention from our responsibility for all the Guidelines of 1973. As long as people challenge Guideline 3, we as a denomination will focus our energy defending it. I believe challenging 1973 is counterproductive to real ministry to homosexual people.
Obliged to Support

We have a problem. It is causing confusion.

The problem is that some voices in the church are speaking and acting like the 1973 position on homosexuality is optional. People are free to disagree with it, some claim, because we are not bound by synodical decisions. So, some disagree openly—in personal conversations, on the internet, in articles in church papers, perhaps even in classrooms or from the pulpit. We should tolerate, even welcome these voices, it is said. These dissenters have a right to their opinions and to express them. By giving them a platform in the church the church tests its positions, learns, and moves forward. Even church leaders, office bearers, have claimed this right for themselves and for others.

This approach to issues may be legitimate for a pluralistic, secular society. But is it acceptable procedure within a confessional church striving to express the unity of Christ's body?

The confusion caused is obvious. This sort of thinking confuses people about the church’s witness. Where does it stand? It confuses people about the nature of synodical decisions. Are they binding? Do we have a right simply to accept or to reject them? It confuses people when the church deals with such dissent in a vacillating or indifferent manner. Does the church really take seriously what it says? Where it stands? Will the church do anything to or about those who express disagreement with its basic positions?

Confusion mutes our witness and undermines life our morality. Doctrine and life are affected.

Fortunately those who plead for openness and a plurality of positions on homosexual practices are few. But the appeal has been made often enough to generate this theme issue of Calvin Seminary Forum.

The purpose of this article is to tackle head-on the argument for the toleration of conflicting positions on homosexual issues (sexual activity between persons of the same gender).

A review of some basic biblical teachings about the church helps in assessing the problem.

The church is those people who believe in Christ and accept him as Lord of their lives. They are participants in his death and resurrection, in that through faith they have died to the old humanity (flesh, world, sinful nature) and been raised to new life in him. Believers are transformed in their thinking and consecrated in their living. They are called to be his witnesses and agents of spiritual renewal in this world. They are guided by his Word in their thinking and living. In doctrine and life they have a solidarity and unity shaped by this Word.

On this basis the apostles call Christians to peace and unity. Paul indicates that they “live worthy of the calling” when they “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (Eph. 4:1, 3) A mark of Christian maturity is attaining “the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.” (Eph. 4:13) Encouraging the Colossians to various expressions of the new life in Christ, he says, “And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body.” (Col. 3:14-15) Similarly, Peter urges Christians to “have unity of spirit” and, quoting Psalm 34, to “seek peace and pursue it.” (1 Peter 3:8, 11) Paul reminds the badly divided Corinthian church that they are to find unity in disputed matters of worship. “For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.” (1 Cor. 14:33)

The Bible grounds the unity and harmony of the church in the nature of God and in the Christ-like nature believers are acquiring. In mind, heart, and spirit they are called to be one in the Lord. Then the church’s witness is clear and its life flourishes. This ideal is not optional. It is an expression of our union with Christ and with one another in Christ. Thus, good churches are confessing churches that take their statements of faith and their definition of Christian living seriously.

Handling Issues in Unity and Peace

Against this background, a question arises of whether the church can ever change. Does peace and unity consign the church to unthinking, unthinking conformity to tradition? How is it possible to think new thoughts? To address past issues? To examine past practices? Does “the faith once delivered to the saints” which we hold precious consign the church to a rigid, authoritarian adherence to what is inherent? Is there no room for biblical discovery? For new applications of the Word to church practice or Christian living? Is there no advance in doctrine?

The answer, obviously, is that part of responsible, obedient service is to “produce things both old and new” for the kingdom. Even nodding acquiescence with the history of the church demonstrates advance in understanding the gospel: the Trinity and Christology (fourth and fifth centuries), faith and justification (sixteenth century), ecumenics and missions (nineteenth and twentieth centuries). New issues and problems have compelled the church to define new standards of Christian faithfulness: about earth-keeping or ecology, about abortion and prolonging life via medical technology, about nuclear armament and warfare, about apartheid and other matters of social justice.

The issue is not whether the church may enter new terrain doctrinally and ethically. It is how the church is to traverse new territory while maintaining peace and unity. We should be

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clearer than some are today about how the church manages change in a way that honors peace and unity.

Every office bearer is asked to make a good faith, clear conscience endorsement of the Christian faith as summarized in our three forms of unity and the universal creeds. They are expected, as part of their commitment to leadership, to teach, defend, and propagate this understanding of the faith (form of subscription, ordination forms). When issues are studied, deliberated, and resolved by our church assemblies, leaders are obligated to implement them and to support them. These decisions are considered “settled and binding” unless proven (by due ecclesiastical process) to contradict the Word of God (church order, art. 29). The church order is not merely descriptive of how the church conducts its affairs, though it does this, but is a prescriptive covenant of how churches will live together in peace and unity. When people and churches honor these commitments, peace and unity are fostered. Thus, it is not without biblical warrant that many synods of the past have stated as a ground for taking a decision that it would “promote the peace and unity of the church.”

In its collective wisdom the churches have defined such ways or mechanisms for considering change as gravamens, overtures, and appeals. The first addresses alleged error in the confessions. The last two initiate considerations of new matters, ask for revisions of previous synodical decisions, or appeal prior handling of matters. Churches or individuals can ask assemblies for a study committee to analyze a new or sensitive issue. If the recommendations of such a committee are approved, change in thought or practice occurs. All these mechanisms provide for orderly, thorough consideration by the church, thus for change that best protects and reflects the peace and harmony of the church.

Until such considered change is approved, the church is bound by its existing doctrine and polity. Leaders are obliged to promote and to defend its positions. This approach promotes the biblical standards of order and harmony.

Even our teachers and professors, who are charged to examine the issues of the day, accept the obligation to defend the positions of the church, even while setting out all sides of an issue or position fairly.

**Causes**

What is the origin, then, of the notion that our church order or synodical positions are merely advisory?

One source undoubtedly is the acid of today's rampant individualism, which eats away the unity and mutual accountability of the body of Christ.

Others are perversity, pride, stubborness, arrogance or other spiritual weaknesses that remain too much a part of us. But a third may be a mistaken, uncritical application of the church’s approach to the women’s ordination issue to the question of homosexuality. Regarding women in office the church repeatedly (1970, 1973, 1976, 1979, 1981, 1984, 1987) appointed committees to examine this subject. The major reports indicated either a biblical allowance for or a biblical warrant for ordaining gifted women; but obscurities and disputed interpretations were acknowledged and came to be openly debated in the church more widely. Several study committees even recommended, and synods decided, that the reports be referred to the churches for study and discussion. In short, by a series of deliberate decisions, the church kept the discussion and study alive for a quarter century. In that very unusual situation (the only comparable case where synods invited sustained discussion that became divisive was the debate over a uniform order of worship, 1916-1934), increasingly people and churches disagreed with synodical decisions, said so, claimed they were free to do so, and even organized their dissent.

Our synods have responded to the issue of homosexuality in a radically different (and much more typical) manner. The synod of 1973, based on a clear and careful study, took a definite and unambiguous position. That position is so solidly held that recent synods have refused to reopen and to review it. The Reformed Ecumenical Council has reiterated it in its own recent study. What the church last year did agree to do was to study better ways to achieve the understanding and support of homosexual persons that 1973 committed us to.

On the issue of homosexuality, therefore, no basis exists for claiming that leaders are free to dissent publicly with the church’s position. There is every basis for expecting them to be fully supportive of it.

“Is the 1973 position on homosexuality optional?”
Consequently, the truth of the Scriptures fits the created order because the same Mediator is responsible for both.

**Thus Christian truth is as specific as the Scriptures and as wide as the creation. If we narrow the horizons and ignore inconvenient truths, we run the risk of turning Christian truth into an ideology.** From Augustine to Calvin the church has been warned not to ignore truth wherever it is found. Of course, the church must not tie itself too quickly to new theories for scientists also can be governed in their interpretations by personal or cultural ideologies. A critical stance is necessary. Still it must be a stance which acknowledges and does not fear God’s truth, whether it be in the created order or in the history of redemption. We may not always know how to fit together the infallible perspective of Scripture and particular truths of the created order, for in this also we see in a glass darkly. But we may not ignore the challenge.

For where truth is not spoken, genuine human freedom is diminished.

**Truth and Freedom**

*Freedom is not license. Life is structured, bounded by the order of creation and the will of the Creator. Ignoring boundaries leads not to freedom but to oppression.*

Voices in our culture proclaim the myth that boundaries are arbitrary, oppressive structures which can simply be willed out of existence. Yet limits exist whether we acknowledge them or not and they exact their price when not acknowledged.

Truth calls for obedience. While truth can be formulated as teaching, it intends to shape human life. Only when we listen to its call and walk in the truth do we experience freedom. When freedom cuts itself loose from truth either by soaring above it or by flying in its face, freedom turns into bondage.

**Postscript**

After four years and thirteen issues, my responsibility for the Forum has come to an end. Serving as editor has been a delightful experience rather than the burden I once thought it would be. Your reception of the Forum has been most encouraging, and the Forum has begun to fill what some perceived as a void in the conversation of the seminary with the church. Although I will not retire until the end of this academic year, it seemed best to appoint a new editor for the beginning of a new year and a new volume of the Forum.

The dream that produced the Forum was that it would be a place where voices in the church could be heard. Most of the voices have been those of seminary professors with a few exceptions. We had hoped that more would have entered the dialogue, but the requirement of writing a full-page article in order to be heard is quite daunting.

My greatest disappointment has been an apparent inability of some who are leaders in the church to listen to opinions with which they disagree. That seems to be an increasing cultural phenomenon, like changing a channel on TV when one does not like what one hears. Today it is difficult even in the church to dialogue about significant differences. Dialogue does not demand assent, only a willingness to take seriously what the other says. The lack of such dialogue in the church is a serious loss that threatens its unity.

The Forum will continue to present responsible voices articulating positions within the limits of Scripture and the confessions. The reader need not agree with everything that is written, but we hope that you will be able to listen even to contrary opinions, to be challenged, and often simply to enjoy the Forum.