

The Proposed Pastoral Letter is a Flawed Document

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The AIC is making recommendations for modification to three documents. Of these, the Pastoral Letter raises the greatest concern. Below are my comments shared with the Committee regarding the conclusion that the Pastoral letter is flawed.

Biblical/Theological Foundations

In this section (bottom, page 2) the reference to 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, in the original report makes the parenthetical comment that this text is “rather an invitation to live in the reality of **being washed ...sanctified ...justified**”. There are two errors with this note. One, it changes the aorist tenses of the verbs in verse 11 to a continuous present tense. The text is best translated “but you **were** washed, you **were** sanctified, you **were** justified”. All four verbs in this verse are past tense, aorist. The original report’s misinterpretation of these past tenses commits the theological error that Catholicism commits by viewing justification as a process and by combining justification and sanctification in a process of salvation. Here the phrase **were sanctified** refers to being “set apart”; this refers to definite sanctification versus progressive sanctification.

Two, the original report allows readers to understand that verses 9-11 refers to those who continue to be washed, sanctified, justified; this implies, unintentionally, that those struggling with the sins listed in verses 9 and 10 are in the process, are unchanged, yet saved. Verse 9 says, “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God?” This introduction tells us that verses 9-11 are about those who live unrighteous lives, not those who struggle with unrighteousness while being saved.

It is strange that this section of the report is brief, perhaps the shorter compared to the “Contemporary Challenges” sections. If this report is seeking a Biblical understanding of SSA, then Matthew 5:27-30 (Jesus’ treatment on lust) would be essential. Colossians 3:5 states that we should “put to death... evil desire”. If that desire is put to death (mortified), then it should not arise again and persist. The issue of mortification of sin is understated in the Letter, seemingly to mean, confessed but not killed.

Pastoral Guidance

In this section of the Letter, on page 11, the proposed statement says, “that means that how one who experiences SSA describes oneself requires the exercise of

wisdom.” This statement ignores that of Ephesians 5:3, “But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be **named** among you, as is proper among saints.” Calling oneself “gay” or a “gay Christian” is not merely unwise, it is wrong.

Our Counsel to the Body of Christ

The statement on page 13, “The absence of opposite-sex sexual desires is not evidence of a lack of sanctification.” This implies that one can be sanctified AND possess same-sex desires. This statement does not have any Biblical support given nor is there any for such a conclusion.

Our Counsel to Sessions and Presbyteries

On page 19, the Letter makes the conclusion, “Upon demonstrating godly responses to these and other questions, we believe candidates may be considered for church office”. Obviously, this includes SSA candidates referenced in those seven preceding questions. There is no biblical support for this statement at all. In fact, the Romans reference (1:26, 27) mentioned earlier calls “dishonorable passions” as a result of God giving these individuals up to His wrath. This passage implies that those with these passions are not Christians at all, subject to God’s wrath (1:18). I am not trying to be judgmental; I am making the point that the conclusion reached on ordination to church office has no Biblical support when Scripture actually condemns those with such passions.

Other Observations

My claim for the Letter being flawed is further supported by the following observations.

First, the Letter’s conclusion (“Upon demonstrating godly responses to these and other questions, we believe candidates may be considered for church office”) does not arrive from the logic of the Biblical Foundations of the report. If one were to study the passages referenced, the conclusion would be opposite to the one given in the proposed report. The report’s conclusion appears to be based upon the “Contemporary Challenges” section, to the exclusion of the texts cited therein. The Westminster Confession of Faith guides the Church to have Scripture as the “supreme judge” of all ecclesiastical matters (1.6 & 1.10). The conclusion regarding the ordination of SSA candidates is rooted in the “traditions of men” which the WCF urges to be subordinate.

Second, this document is flawed because the Committee was given a flawed document to modify. The original document does not deal with matters relative to

church membership i.e., Can/should homosexual persons become church members? What about SSA persons? There is no guidance on these questions. That report was designed to discuss human sexuality without a conversation on membership. The Committee chose to use that report to arrive at a conclusion regarding ordination. The Letter's conclusion regarding ordination skips the questions of membership and how this is to be handled.

Third, this report is flawed because it mixes the qualifications of church membership with those of ordained office. Are these the same? While an important contribution of the Reformed tradition is the "priesthood of all believers" this does not mean that church members have identical qualifications to church officers. First Timothy 3 and Titus 1 provide the necessary implication that not every member of a church should become an officer. These officers should be "above reproach" (1 Tim 3:2 & Titus 1:7). The proposed report does not discuss such differences; it may actually diminish those differences by implying that officers and members are alike.

Fourth, the proposed report is flawed because it ignores any treatment of the Biblical texts about church officers. There is no mention at all, nor any allusion to the Biblical understanding of church officers. If the Letter is giving a conclusion as the one made on page 19 about church officers, why does not it have a section on ordination qualifications for these individuals?

The claim that the Pastoral Letter is a flawed document is not one made lightly. The Letter itself carries the weight of codifying in the EPC the ordination of SSA candidates. As such, greater integrity to Scripture and theological reflection is warranted but not given.