

June 3, 1996

Dear Commissioner:

We, the undersigned, earnestly request that you will read the attached Statement and consider it carefully. We are all professors of either Old Testament or New Testament. We represent over half of the Faculty in Bible in our Presbyterian seminaries at the present.

We hope that the attached statement "The Whole Bible for the Whole Human Family" will assist you as you wrestle with some of the issues of this Assembly. We are greatly concerned that the Bible be heard, interpreted appropriately, and continue to guide us all in our quest for understanding, reconciliation, and justice.

A.K.M. Adam
Brian K. Blount
Robert L. Brawley
William P. Brown
Walter Brueggemann
John T. Carroll
Edward F. Campbell
Marvin L. Chancy
Robert B Coote
Charles B. Cousar
Lewis R. Donelson
Elizabeth Gordon Edwards
Susan R. Garrett
Beverly R. Gaventa
Theodore Hiebert

Jared Judd Jackson
W. Eugene March
Patrick D. Miller
Margaret M. Mitchell
Cyrus Moon
James D. Newsome
Kathleen O'Connor
Dennis T. Olson
KatharirLe Doob Sakenfeld
Stanley P. Saunders
Choon-Leong Seow
Johanna W.H. van Wijk-Bos
Herman C. Waetjen
Patricia T. Willey
Antoinette C. Wire

The Whole Bible for the Whole Human Family

Members of the Biblical Faculty of the Presbyterian Seminaries Speak to the issue of Ordination

As members of the church universal and as professors of Scripture in our Presbyterian seminaries, we affirm that the Bible is an indispensable means of God's communication, especially in a time when the church is urgently seeking to clarify its message and mission in the world. The question of whether gay or lesbian Christians should be ordained to the offices of deacon, elder, and minister of the Word and Sacrament arises at such a time.

We observe that this debate often revolves around six passages that refer to same-sex relationships we would first of all caution the church against wresting these passages out of context and pressing them into service in our debate. On careful reading, these passages seem to be advocating values such as hospitality to strangers, ritual purity, or the sinfulness of all human beings before God. Before we can hear their meaning for our time, we must first understand their meaning in their own time.

Secondly, we would caution the church against any hasty conclusion that these passages present instructions for us on what we know as homosexuality today. In important sections of the Bible – the Ten Commandments, the prophets, the teaching of Jesus – this issue does not arise. Indeed the concept of homosexuality as now understood may not appear at all in the Bible. It is likely that the biblical authors never contemplated the phenomenon that we have been able to name and describe for only a little over a hundred years, a sexual orientation which is integral to the identity of a small minority of the human family.

Thirdly, we caution the church against an interpretation of the Bible that leads the church into pronouncing judgment upon a specific behavior of a whole category of persons in the human community. As the 1982 General Assembly observed in its Guidelines for the interpretation of Scripture in Times of Controversy, "Let all interpretations be in accord with the rule of love, the twofold commandment to love God and to love our neighbor".

We would encourage the church at this time to interpret particular passages of the Bible in the light of the whole Bible, and in the recognition that Jesus Christ, the Redeemer is the living Word of God. It is the gospel of Jesus that invites gay and lesbian brothers and sisters to full communion in the church; it is the Spirit of Jesus that calls and equips Christians for ministry; and it is the justice of Jesus that calls us to insure that those who are invited, called, and equipped are free to fulfill their ministries among us with the full recognition and support of the church.

May, 1996

Editor's note (added March, 1998)

Jim Tiefenthal transferred this document from paper to electronic format in March, 1998, at Rochester, NY. Betty Iwan proofread the text. Although loving care was taken to preserve the original text, MLCN cannot guarantee accuracy.