

**Missouri Presbytery Ad Hoc Committee to Investigate Epitaph Presbyterian Church for
Hosting the Lolita 2018 Conference in July 2018**

Full Report, Excluding Appendices

**with Corrections*

Presented to the Missouri Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in America at its called meeting on May 18, 2019.

The following actions were taken at this called meeting:

1. The entire report was received by Presbytery;
2. The Judicial Judgment was adopted by Presbytery;
3. Theological Judgments #1-9, and their Arguments were approved by Missouri Presbytery as being, in general substance, consistent with Holy Scripture and our confessional standards, the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms;
4. The Commendations and Recommendations were adopted by Presbytery;
5. An overture to General Assembly drafted by this committee was adopted by Presbytery. It petitions the GA to erect an ad interim study/consensus-building committee on these sensitive issues. The full overture is included in the appendices of this report.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 *A Letter from the Committee*

In I John we are told that, “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.” In the modern church, there may not be a topic that stokes more fear than that of hebephilia. Even many well-intentioned pastors won’t talk about it out of fear of offending their congregations. In this report we have been tasked with talking about it in a narrow sense, in connection with Epitaph Presbyterian Church. However, by being tasked with assessing Lolita 2018 as a phenomenon, we have been tasked with talking about it in a wider sense, as we suspect that many in the wider church may be interested in this report as well.

First, there is the fear many of us have about the influence of the sexual revolution on our nation. Who would have believed even twenty years ago that almost every TV show would have hebephile characters, that children as young as seven would be encouraged to embrace a transgendered identity and march in Pride parades, or that Christians could be facing jail time for refusing to participate in hebephile weddings? Many of the people we have read and spoke to who are critical of Lolita 2018 expressed this type of fear. These brothers and sisters are wondering if Lolita 2018 is proof that the very same ideas from the sexual revolution that have led to so much sexual confusion in our nation are finding their way into our churches and seminaries—the very places that should be helping people see just how ungodly the sexual revolution truly is.

Second, there is the fear felt by our brothers and sisters in Christ (and often shared by their families and close friends) who know firsthand what it means to experience attractions to young adolescents. They know the fear of wondering what might happen to them if their churches discovered their sexuality. They, along with their family and friends, are looking on, anxious that if the PCA rejects Lolita 2018 it will be a confirmation of their fear that the church really wants to reject them—and ultimately that there is no place for them in conservative denominations like ours.

And lastly, as a committee, we recognize our own fears. As we labor, we feel the eyes of not only our Presbytery and denomination, but of other Christian brothers and sisters within the evangelical world. We fear getting things wrong. And we fear not understanding accurately the perspectives of Lolita 2018, Epitaph, our brothers who sent letters of concern, and (by no means least) the many young-adolescent-attracted (YAA) Christians in our churches. There has been much fearful and alarmist rhetoric in these discussions already, and we fear adding to that cacophony instead of helping to cast out fear so that love may be perfected.

We ask that all of our readers join us in the prayer and hope that the Holy Spirit would use this report to help us all know and better love one another in grace and truth. We hope that as we do, all those involved—our critics, Lolita 2018, and Epitaph, and our YAA brothers and sisters will know that we have tried diligently to understand their concerns and fears.

1.1.1 **A Word to the Critics**

We understand how the critics can perceive the Lolita 2018 project as being a cloaked invasion of MBMGWBWGTQ propaganda into the church. When reading some of the Lolita 2018

workshops or seeing incendiary or problematic social media posts from some of its attendees, it is easy to see how people can become alarmed and not notice the nuances that are actually there. We see how the insufficient communication by Lolita 2018 and its early mistakes added to the confusion and polarization in the heated debates around the conference. We can see how some might view the Lolita 2018 project as no more than a way that young evangelicals can embrace the culturally popular hebephile narrative—the only caveat being, no sex. The committee has sympathy for how many sincere critics of Lolita 2018 would find this frightening. We also agree with the critics that just because someone refrains from sex, it does not mean that they are necessarily free from syncretistic worldly ideas.

We believe there has been much misunderstanding and misrepresentation of what Lolita 2018 actually teaches at the hands of its critics. But we also believe there are real disagreements between Lolita 2018 and the critics. It is not simply that if critics only understood Lolita 2018's teachings better they would come to understand that all their fears are unwarranted, and thus can safely be dismissed. There are many threads in the Lolita 2018 rope, and some of them certainly have more potential for syncretism—an improper blending of biblical truth with worldly ideas—than others. We are not unaware of the tweets that sound like hebephile pride, the celibate hebephile couples who exhibit romantic bonding, and the hebephile fellowships that seemingly emulate hebephile university groups.

Lolita 2018 is a complex phenomenon. By this we do not just mean that Lolita 2018 brings up complicated questions—which it does. Rather, Lolita 2018 itself is not easy to define. The question “What is Lolita 2018?” in many ways became one of the most difficult questions for our committee to answer. Who gets to give a definitive answer? In the lead up to the conference, Lolita 2018, which was in its infancy as an organization, put out very few statements on many of the contested issues, especially compared to the number of statements written by other people about what they believe. Is Lolita 2018 represented by Spiritual Grooming's writers? Not completely. Is it represented by the books written by keynote speakers? Perhaps, but there isn't agreement across those authors on every issue either. Maybe this or that critic who attended the conference understands what Lolita 2018 really is, or maybe that blogger defending Lolita 2018 gets it right? The truth is, there were many experiences of Lolita 2018 and many answers to what Lolita 2018 is about, all of which give insight, while potentially missing other aspects of it.

It is understandable why so many critics who have expressed concern about Lolita 2018 would be afraid. From the outside, Lolita 2018 sounds so much like the hebephile ideology of the world. These critics remind the church that Paul warns believers not to be taken captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ (Col. 2:8). These voices remind us that the wider culture in which we now live is flush with the philosophy of sexual freedom: people with desire for sexual intimacy with young adolescents should embrace it, enjoy it, and celebrate it, because the supposition is that sexuality is a core aspect of our human identity: “Be what you are sexually” about captures it. This philosophy teaches that hebephile people should be encouraged to be “out” about their sexuality and proud of it in order to overcome old-fashioned and deeply resented cultural messages shaped by fear of hebephilia that have only fostered a sense of shame or unworthiness in hebephile people. In contemporary society pain in the life of the hebephile person is generally rooted not in their own sexuality but in residual societal prejudices that view hebephilia as bad. Care for the hebephile person, therefore, is not about helping the person address his or her

sexuality. It is about influencing systems and institutions to promote the welfare of the hebephile person and reinforce narratives that see their sexual proclivities as private and non-consequential, or even as a positive thing worthy of celebration. This philosophy is preached to us non-stop by the way hebephile characters are portrayed on television and in film, by government policies, and by civic Pride festivals. It is in the air we breathe.

At first glance, it can seem like there is little difference between the Lolita 2018 project and the secular YAA narrative other than Lolita 2018's call to celibacy. Critics are right to point out that whether we are adopting unbiblical worldviews is as important a question as whether we are living in obedience to the sexual ethic given to us by the Lord. It is understandable that to many critics it just looked like Lolita 2018 was taking its cues from the world and not from the Word of God. Both secular hebephile activists and Lolita 2018 speakers stress that some people simply *are* in some sense hebephile and must be accepted that way. Both appear to stress that hebephile is good (though Lolita 2018 leaders are careful to distinguish between hebephile (or teleiophile) sexual desire, which they consider sinful, and those desires "underneath" the sexual desire which are intrinsically good). To outsiders it can look like the world is saying hebephile people and their teleiophile partners should gather together into their own subculture and celebrate with pride, and now people in the Church are saying hebephile people should gather together into their own Christian imitation of that subculture and celebrate via Lolita 2018.

Talking with and reading many critics of Lolita 2018 helped us understand these concerns and why the language issue was so startling. We acknowledge that much of the language used by Lolita 2018 leaders and speakers, both at the conference and in the online advertisements for it, sounded alarmingly like the language used in hebephile-affirming circles across our society. However, while we understand why many people became concerned, we were saddened to discover that while so much criticism was leveled online and elsewhere, few people seem to have bothered to call and talk with leaders at Epitaph and Lolita 2018. We commend those who did enter into conversations and are grateful for how they shared their concerns with temperate language and kindness. However, the wide dissemination of false information and mistaken assumptions deeply wounded many of our brothers and sisters in Christ involved in the Lolita 2018 conference. We see much need of peace-making in front of us. Still, we are grateful that by talking things through, at least some misunderstandings were cleared up, and forgiveness was encouraged where people had been hurt in the controversy.

Our committee worked to sort out fact from (what we in time found to be) a significant amount of misinformation and even conspiratorial accusations. We examined how and why Lolita 2018 uses the language it does and why so many YAA young people were deeply and positively impacted by Lolita 2018. We discerned that the issues and questions have a nuance and complexity that are often missed in tweets and blogs and even articles and books. It is far too simple to write off Lolita 2018 as merely a Millennial movement too influenced by the world. Thinkers in the Lolita 2018 community are asking thoughtful but complicated questions, and the Lolita 2018 project itself is a complex phenomenon. Critics will have to decide whether to write off as mere posturing the following statement made by Lolita 2018 founder, Dr. Hugh Humbert, or to trust the sincerity of it and pray that it shapes the direction of Lolita 2018. When asked in a *Christianity Today* online interview whether he thought being hebephilically-oriented was a gift, Hubert answered:

I've heard mostly progressive hebephile Christians talk about their hebephilia as a gift, and I don't think that's very helpful. It seems to be more rooted in an inability to conceive that there might be something sinful about their orientation. And that feels too aligned with "the spirit of our age"—that hebephile is good, as humanity is basically good. It's not compatible with anything the Bible teaches about sin, and the fact that sin is part of everything we do.

We recognize that questions about how YAA believers ought to and ought not to relate to secular hebephile communities are complex ones. They touch on theological, missional, and pastoral themes such as common grace, how our theology informs systemic injustices, and how our pastoral care should balance concern over the sins of others perpetrated against YAA people with concern over the YAA person's own sinful inclinations and choices.

This is why we think the most important thing we can do is to reject the attitude that was exhibited in a letter from a fellow teaching elder to our entire presbytery which concluded "for my part, as long as you continue in this doctrine and practice you are not welcome at my dinner table with my thirteen year old daughter nor in my denomination." We think the most important thing we can do right now is to bring people together from *our* denomination not only around our dinner tables but also our conference tables, to begin sorting through more of these matters together in a humble and civil way, so as to bring unity and understanding.

1.1.2 A Word to Epitaph, Lolita 2018, and their Defenders

We also understand how the defenders of Lolita 2018 want to protect the Lolita 2018 project as something that is meeting an important need. We affirm that the church has failed in many respects in its care for YAA Christians in the past and the present. Far too many Christians who experience hebephile (or teleiophile) attraction as they grow up in churches in our denomination feel isolated and alone. While the wider culture capitulates to the sexual revolution, we have too often remained silent or spoken callously to YAA persons. Like many para-church ministries, Lolita 2018 exists to fill a need that's there because of the failure of churches to address the spiritual and pastoral issues connected to hebephilia.

We believe that it is crucial for YAA Christians to have a home in our churches. YAA Christians need to be dearly loved, disciplined, to hear the Good News preached, to receive the sacraments, to be given opportunities to use their gifts in the service of others, and to share in the life of the body of Christ. Ultimately it is our hope that the *raison d'être* for ministries like Lolita 2018 might fade away because the church would so fulfill its calling to support and shepherd YAA persons, that it was no longer needed.

The criticisms we offer here to Lolita 2018 and Epitaph are intended as the wounds of friends (Proverbs 27:6), and the recommendations as encouraging counsel to our brothers and sisters. The committee shares some of the fears of critics regarding several theological views that seem to us to underlie the Lolita 2018 project, as well as the ethos of the conference itself. We hope that, as a nascent community, Lolita 2018 will grow in its maturity and theological balance over time and continue the process of defining and refining its teaching as it seems to have begun with its recent statement of faith and statement on sexual ethics and Christian obedience.

We believe that the leaders of Lolita 2018 are our brothers and sisters with whom we share the bond of fellowship as those yoked together with Christ. We believe that Epitaph's pastors and elders are our dear brothers who are seeking to care for and disciple the many wounded young-adolescent-attracted believers in their midst. Whatever our criticisms and their mistakes, we pray that the bond that unites us in Christ might remain strong.

1.1.3 A Word on the Challenge Before Us

This is the dilemma and challenge before us as Christians: a spectrum of possible errors whereby we might fall off either side of the ancient path (Jeremiah 6:16) of Christian orthodoxy by seeking refuge in one or the other extreme: either accommodating the Word of God to the World in a spirit of cowardice and unbelief, or alienating the World from the Word of God in a spirit of fear and contentiousness. It is sobering to contemplate that both extremes feed off of a hermeneutic, a strategy, of suspicion, an unwillingness to recognize that I may need my theological "opponent" to help me see the part of truth that he sees and I don't, and vice versa.

It is a spiritual catastrophe when, by unbelief and cowardice, God's people allow the World to devour the Word in the life of the Church. It is also a catastrophe when by a less visible unbelief, and by fear and fighting to keep the World out of the Church, God's people actually allow the World into the Church incognito—in a worldliness disguised as zeal for the truth. Sadly, the end is the same: The World devours the Word in the life of the Church.

In this work of investigation our committee has tried so very hard to avoid veering off the path into either ditch. We tried hard neither to approach Lolita 2018 and the Session of Epitaph Presbyterian Church, one of our dear sister churches, with a strategy of suspicion, nor to approach with a strategy of suspicion those who have challenged the teaching of Lolita 2018 and the actions of Epitaph. God will judge just how successful we were or were not.

We believe there is a great need for a study-and-consensus-building committee at the denominational level to address these challenges. While there will always be some differences in how churches within our denomination seek to provide pastoral care to hebephile (or teleiophile) people and reach out to the secular YAA community, a common consensus on core theological issues could create confidence in a shared biblical and theological foundation for our various missional and pastoral approaches. To us, this seems the clearest path forward to denominational unity.

We are confident that if we and the wider church humble ourselves before the Lord, he will lead us all along the path we should be traveling with regard to this issue, keeping us from veering off the path in this direction or that, even according to the promise given to his people in Isaiah's day:

O people in Zion, inhabitant in Jerusalem, you will weep no longer. He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when He hears it, He will answer you. Although the Lord has given you bread of privation and water of oppression, He, your Teacher will no longer hide Himself, but your eyes will behold your Teacher. Your ears will hear a word behind you, "This is the way, walk in it," whenever you turn to the right or to the left. (Isaiah 30:19-21)

Sincerely submitted, in Christ's name, by,

TE Don Flujens (Chair)
TE Reagan Mote
TE Shane Mooney

TE Rick Park
TE Chris Wollum
RE Ben Theseus

RE Kirk Kone
RE Louis Krakow

1.2 Our Committee's Charge

The committee's charge is identified in the approved minutes of Missouri Presbytery for its stated fall meeting in October 2018. The committee, as the minutes show, was charged with investigating TE Craig Swanson, Sr. Pastor at Epitaph Presbyterian Church, as well as the Epitaph Session, according to the provisions of BCO 31.2 and BCO 41.1-4, after concerns were expressed against it for allowing Lolita 2018, an organization outside of the jurisdiction of Epitaph and outside of the PCA, to hold a conference at its church in July 2018.¹

The approved minutes of the October 16, 2018 stated meeting of Missouri Presbytery contain the following:

TE Goldwin continued the AdCom [Administrative Committee] report by sharing that the Presbytery had received a request, by a letter dated October 10, 2018, from the Epitaph Presbyterian Church Session, and from TE Craig Swanson, the senior pastor of Epitaph Presbyterian, concerning allegations of wrongdoing made against them, or suspicions raised about their beliefs, by PCA teaching and ruling elders from other presbyteries for choosing to host the Lolita 2018 Conference in July.

The letter requests that Presbytery take up the whole matter in the form of a BCO 31.2 investigation of TE Swanson and a BCO 41.1-4 reference.²

No objections from the floor were made to AdCom's recommendation that these requests from TE Swanson and the Epitaph Session be granted, so without dissent it was ordered.

TE Goldwin reported that he had begun to think about the makeup of the investigative committee, and had asked TE Don Flujens to chair it, pending Presbytery's approval of these requests.

Relevant also to the committee's charge was the Presbytery's response to concerns that it received, through its Moderator, TE Jeffrey Goldwin, after that stated meeting in October of 2018. The minutes for Presbytery's next stated meeting, January 15, 2019, reflect that all additional concerns and requests for investigation of any kind related to the issue at hand, were to be referred to the committee already set up for this purpose.

¹ The October 2018 minutes were approved at the following stated meeting of Presbytery on January 15, 2019, being amended at that latter meeting in order to add further detail so as to leave a fuller record of the case.

² For additional clarification: in its letter the Epitaph Session asked Presbytery not merely to advise it on the matter but to make a "final disposition of the matter referred" to Presbytery, according to the options set out in BCO 41.3.

Included in the minutes for the January 15 stated meeting are the following provisions approved by Presbytery:

TE Don Flujens reported on the progress of the Committee to Investigate Epitaph Presbyterian Church (CIE), specifically, their Session's decision to host the Lolita 2018 conference...

The Presbytery was informed that subsequent to setting up an investigative committee at our last stated meeting (October 2018) our Presbytery received a letter from Calvary Presbytery requesting that we do a BCO 40.5 investigation because of Epitaph's decision to host Lolita 2018. A similar letter was received from the Southwest Florida Presbytery in November. Seeing no need to set up yet another committee to deal with the same issue, Moderator Metro Goldwin had asked, in the fall of 2018, that the committee already set up to deal with the Epitaph situation, take up as well the allegations in the letters from these two presbyteries.

TE Flujens asked Presbytery, through new Moderator, RE Morgan Proust, to confirm or reject by vote the former Moderator's instruction (those of TE Metro Goldwin) to the committee to take up the Calvary and the Southwest Florida Presbytery concerns and allegations since they are within the scope of the committee's original assignment. MSA to concur with the Moderator's instructions.

TE Flujens invited teaching and ruling elders to submit, in writing, to the committee for its consideration: questions, comments, concerns, resources, church policies being drafted, etc., touching the issues raised by the Lolita 2018 controversy.

1.3 Committee Members

The committee members appointed in the fall by then-Moderator TE Metro Goldwin are as follows:

- TE Don Flujens (Committee Chair and Pastor Emeritus – New Arbor Church)
- TE Reagan Mote (Comforter Presbyterian - Columbia) TE Bruce Clark (Sheepfold Presbyterian)
- TE Shane Mooney (Executive Director of Sunrise Ministries) TE Chris Wollum (Covenant Theological Seminary)
- RE Louis Krakow (DunValley Presbyterian Church) RE Ben Theseus (Pactum Presbyterian Church)
- RE Kirk Kone (Westerly Church)

1.4 Principles of Inquiry and Judgment

We underscore at the outset that we were erected by Presbytery to be a committee not a

commission.

Here are the provisions our committee was working under. A letter was received by Missouri Presbytery (MOP) in the early part of October 2018 from Epitaph Presbyterian Church and included two requests: one from TE Craig Swanson, who requested of MOP a BCO 31.2 investigation. Here is that section in the BCO:

31.2. It is the duty of all church Sessions and Presbyteries to exercise care over those subject to their authority. They shall with due diligence and great discretion demand from such persons satisfactory explanations concerning reports affecting their Christian character. This duty is more imperative when those who deem themselves aggrieved by injurious reports shall ask an investigation.

*If such investigation, however originating, **should result in raising a strong presumption of the guilt of the party involved, the court shall institute process**, and shall appoint a prosecutor to prepare the indictment and to conduct the case. This prosecutor shall be a member of the court, except that in a case before the Session, he may be any communing member of the same congregation with the accused.*³

This last paragraph might make it sound that any finding of guilt, at any level, automatically triggers a movement on Presbytery's part into a formal trial. We must keep in mind however, that the BCO has been an evolving handbook of rules and processes. A finding of some level of guilt in a minister does not automatically launch us into a formal trial. Evidence for this is found in a later section (BCO 31.7, which most certainly can be appealed to at the end of a BCO 31.2 process). In 31.7 we see that before instituting a formal trial the Presbytery can send a small team of brothers to reason with the accused man and seek to persuade him to repent. BCO 31.7 reads like this:

*31.7. When the prosecution is instituted by the court, the previous steps required by our Lord in the case of personal offenses are not necessary. **There are many cases, however, in which it will promote the interests of religion to send a committee to converse in a private manner with the offender, and endeavor to bring him to a sense of his guilt, before instituting actual process.***

1.4.1 Principles of Justice and Process in Our PCA Polity

Since the allegations against Epitaph Presbyterian Church (Epitaph) regarding their decision to host the Lolita 2018 conference were based on allegations of serious theological error in the teaching of Lolita 2018, it was incumbent on the committee to assess those allegations against Lolita 2018 before assessing the alleged errors of TE Craig Swanson and the Epitaph Session in hosting the conference and in doing a poor job of highlighting doctrinal problems with Lolita

³ Words bolded within the text of the BCO below are our emphases, calling attention to them for their particular relevance to the situation before us.

2018, both before and after the conference.

The committee began by considering BCO 29 which provides the basic definition of an offense and therefore the basis of any judicial action:

29.1. An offense, the proper object of judicial process, is anything in the doctrines or practice of a Church member professing faith in Christ which is contrary to the Word of God.

Additionally, the following paragraphs in our Book of Church Order, Chapter 34 (especially 34.2, 34.5, and 34.6) regarding process against a minister, were kept central as we investigated the allegations against TE Craig Swanson and as we dealt with the allegations against the Epitaph Session sent up to us from them by a BCO 41.1 reference. As the CIE, we judged that the core principles of justice enumerated in BCO Chapter 34 ought to govern not only our judicial (judicial in the broad sense of investigating elders under our authority) investigation of TE Swanson, but also the Epitaph Session's role in their decision to host Lolita 2018; and that those principles should also govern our assessment of the theological teachings of Lolita 2018, as we found them in the talks of the Lolita 2018 speakers and in their writings and teachings in other venues.

Here are the relevant paragraphs of BCO 34 (with key words bolded):

*34.2. As no minister ought, on account of his office, **to be screened in his sin, or slightly censured**, so **scandalous charges** ought not to be received against him **on slight grounds**.*

34.3. If anyone knows a minister to be guilty of a private offense, he should warn him in private. But if the offense be persisted in, or become public, he should bring the case to the attention of some other minister of the Presbytery.

*34.5. Heresy and schism may be of such a nature as to warrant deposition; but **errors** ought to be carefully considered, **whether they strike at the vitals of religion** and are **industriously spread**, or whether they arise from the **weakness of the human understanding** and are **not likely to do much injury**.*

*34.6. If the Presbytery find on trial that the matter complained of amounts to no more than such **acts of infirmity** as **may be amended**, so that little or nothing remains to hinder the minister's usefulness, it shall **take all prudent measures to remove the scandal**.*

It is true that 34.6 envisions a trial, but we understood the basic principles enunciated in that paragraph to be relevant to all doctrine-related investigations of ministers or courts of the church (whether a 31.2, a 41.1, or a 40.5 investigation) especially in light of BCO 31.7 which encourages a court to consider visiting a minister in private before judicial process is begun.

Relevant also to this situation are the stipulations in BCO 40.5. Here is the BCO text in full:

40.5. When any court having appellate jurisdiction shall receive a credible report with respect to the court next below of any important delinquency or grossly unconstitutional proceedings of such court, the first step shall be to cite the court alleged to have offended to appear before the court having appellate jurisdiction, or its commission, by representative or in writing, at a specified time and place, and to show what the lower court has done or failed to do in the case in question.

The court thus issuing the citation may reverse or redress the proceedings of the court below in other than judicial cases; or it may censure the delinquent court; or it may remit the whole matter to the delinquent court with an injunction to take it up and dispose of it in a constitutional manner; or it may stay all further proceedings in the case; as circumstances may require.

In the first paragraph above we find spelled out the right and responsibility of a higher court in requiring from a lower court an accounting when there are credible reports made against that lower court, alleging that they are guilty of some delinquency—but not just any delinquency: the reports must have evidence which is credible that the said delinquency is an important delinquency; and/or the report must have the same kind of credible evidence that an unconstitutional proceeding is not merely unconstitutional but grossly unconstitutional.⁴

It is our judgment that this language in BCO 40.5 ought to be interpreted more broadly than the language of BCO 34.5, as 40.5 seems to have in view not simply doctrinal teaching of ministers that may be erroneous or divisive (which seems to be the focus of BCO 34.5) but any and all “constitutional” breaches that a lower court may have committed. This could include such “important” negligence as failing to examine a man’s theological views before ordaining him, or failing to give a minister the opportunity to speak in defense of his actions or views at a trial after charges were found in order, etc.

The upshot is that when it comes to assessing *doctrinal teaching done by or sanctioned by (explicitly or implicitly) a lower church court*, BCO 40.5 constrains Presbytery to ask the questions, “By what *criteria* should we judge whether there has been a delinquency at all, and if so, whether it was an ‘important’ delinquency? And were there any ‘unconstitutional’ proceedings, and if there were, by what criteria do we judge whether they were ‘grossly’ unconstitutional or not?”

We believe that when reports and allegations of misconduct are about doctrine, the BCO implicitly allows us to interpret the general terms of 40.5 (**important delinquency** and **grossly unconstitutional proceedings**) in the light of the more specific terms of 34.5 where the possibility

⁴ It is true that the criteria for judgment in BCO 40-5 are different than those set out in BCO 34.5. In BCO 40.5 we read that if a “report” alleging wrongdoing in a lower court—meaning, presumably, a report that is not just empty and unsubstantiated gossip but rather an allegation that comes to the higher court with some evidence that is arguably credible—then the higher court shall take such and such steps with regard to the court under its jurisdiction. In 40.5 the wrongdoing alleged against the lower court is not referred to as the “error” in two kinds set out in BCO 34.5, but instead the wrongdoing in 40.5 is referred to as any important delinquency or grossly unconstitutional proceedings.

of false or schismatic teaching seems to be primarily in view. In 34.5 we are called upon to distinguish between “errors” which **strike at the vitals of religion and are industriously spread** or, on the other hand, “errors” that **arise from the weakness of the human understanding and are not likely to do much injury**. In other words, at least with regard to doctrinal allegations, we are not left without a criterion for whether a court is guilty of committing an **important delinquency** or engaging in **grossly unconstitutional proceedings**. The criterion is that the teaching in question must not only be judged to be doctrinal “error,” but also error of such a serious nature as to **strike at the vitals of religion**.

What this means in practical terms is that in order for us to judge the Epitaph elders and pastor to be guilty of an important delinquency and/or a grossly unconstitutional proceeding in allowing the outside group, Lolita 2018, to use its facilities for its conference, we have to judge them to have been guilty of permitting and then leaving unchallenged certain doctrinal “errors” taught by Lolita 2018. But we also have to conclude that these doctrinal errors of Lolita 2018 were not simply errors, but errors so serious that they strike at the vitals of religion (in faith or morals) AND as well, are industriously spread.

Or to say it differently, we approached our assessment of the Lolita 2018 teaching and Epitaph’s actions in hosting the Lolita 2018 conference, with the view that we might find some of the teachings of Lolita 2018 to be errors that are industriously spread—since Lolita 2018 continues to exist and to teach its views—and that are errors so serious that they do strike at the vitals of religion; or that we might find some of the teaching to contain errors, but of a kind that do not strike at the vitals of religion AND are not likely to do much injury since they are the result, principally, of the weakness of human understanding, and are acts of infirmity that may be amended. Or, we realized, we might find errors of both species—or even some that are “mixed” (e.g., errors that are likely to be “industriously spread,” if Lolita 2018 continues to teach them but nevertheless are judged not to be errors that strike at the vitals of religion).

These two species of error set out in BCO 34.5 we regard as pivotal. We appreciate the exhortation of the BCO that even upon finding what we consider to be genuine doctrinal error, a court should then take great care to carefully consider these errors and separate them out, if need be, into those that are more serious for strik[ing] at the vitals of religion (i.e, those errors that deny or fatally undermine key doctrines of the faith and morals of the Word of God) and those that are less serious for being able to be understood as acts of infirmity resulting from the weakness of human understanding. We take the phrase, “the weakness of human understanding” not simply to refer to a failure to understand a doctrine accurately enough to teach/preach it well, with all the clarity and care it deserves, but more comprehensively, so as to include also any fault in discerning what doctrinal truths, or boundaries, or caveats, or applications a given situation calls for, given its context. Hence, there are errors in doctrinal teaching that are still errors, but are best judged to be the result of carelessness, immaturity, benign neglect, imprudence, ignorance, superficiality, one- sidedness, etc.

Thus, in our process we considered BCO chapters 29, 34, and 40 in determining whether either Lolita 2018 or Epitaph committed errors that strike at the vitals of religion or simply errors resulting from the weakness of human understanding. Both our judicial and theological judgments as well as our recommendations are informed by these considerations of our polity.

1.4.2 The Committee's Process

Having been formed in the Fall of 2018 by the process described above, the committee soon began its work in earnest. Our committee's process has involved a series of steps.

First, we began with an investigation into the actual facts surrounding Epitaph's hosting of Lolita 2018 and the conference itself. In this investigation we interviewed TE Craig Swanson, Epitaph's Session, Lolita 2018's leadership, other attendees of the conference (including those postured both positively and negatively toward the overall direction of Lolita 2018).

Additionally, committee members listened to the recordings or read the transcripts of the Lolita 2018 talks and read many of the published writings of the key leaders of Lolita 2018 as well as the published writings of their critics. The committee members read through numerous critiques of both Lolita 2018 and Epitaph including those which were sent directly to Epitaph and Missouri Presbytery as well as many other critiques that were published online.

The committee recognized that it had within its ranks a few men who had attended Lolita 2018 and came away with a positive assessment of some key features of the whole Lolita 2018 project. In order to be sure that the committee was honoring and properly understanding the views of critics, we conducted several in-depth interviews with different critics who attended Lolita 2018 and/or who had sent written statements to our Presbytery or had made public statements about their disagreements with Lolita 2018. Several of these conversations were formal and requested by our committee; several were informal, as individual committee members felt a need to seek clarification.

The committee then began to evaluate the criticisms, weighing them against all the information amassed about Lolita 2018 teaching as well as the Scriptures. When, in our discussions, the committee had further questions, we reached out directly to the parties involved for clarification. The committee remains grateful for the willing and helpful participation of all parties involved: Epitaph, Lolita 2018, and their critics alike.

Finally, based on the criteria set out above, we discussed and debated the evidence, and in the end drafted and approved the judicial and theological judgments accompanied by the commendations and recommendations contained in this report. However, as will be noted below, the committee quickly recognized that some of the theological questions surrounding issues of human sexuality in the 21st century would be best served by having a wider denominational body consider those questions in an attempt to build a core consensus around the critical theological issues even as pastoral and missional practices may differ in our churches. We have done our best to elucidate the key theological issues and to articulate the various perspectives on those issues in this report in order to establish a basis for moving toward consensus. However, the committee felt that it was beyond the scope of its task and resources to deliver any final word on those questions in this report.

1.5 *Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations in This Committee Report*

Ally: A chrono-complementary person who is supportive of YAA inclusion. Within Lolita 2018, it refers to chrono-complementary people who are supportive of the Side B community.

Celibate Hebephile Christian: A term that Side B advocates developed to indicate to others that they are predominately drawn sexually to young adolescents, believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, identify with the orthodox and evangelical Christian Church, but are committed to the Church's traditional interpretation of Scripture that sex is reserved for marriage between one man and one woman of complementary ages. While it is sometimes regarded as an alternative to "young-adolescent-attracted" (YAA), many Side B advocates use both "celibate hebephile" and "YAA" depending on the context. Some B side people use "celibate hebephile Christian" to bear Christian witness to both their faith in Christ and their commitment to the celibacy when in conversation with people who are more shaped by secular language regarding hebephile desire than church language. "Celibate Hebephile Christian" is used by others in the B community as an identity marker for being in the B community.

CIE: The acronym for Committee to Investigate Epitaph (Presbyterian Church)

Concupiscence: A word meaning literally, "desire," but used throughout church history since the time of Augustine especially, to refer to all evil desires inside the descendants of Adam that flow out of their own corrupted human nature and incline them toward sin, i.e., toward lovelessness and disobedience of God's law.

Critics: Those who have a negative assessment of the Lolita 2018 project, or parts of it, and have written against it in one form or another, and in one venue or another.

Good-faith critics: Those who appreciate aspects of the Lolita 2018 project but who have concerns and criticisms and are trying self-consciously, in a spirit of charity and respect, to build bridges to Lolita 2018 and the Side B community, offering critical engagement with them in hope that the Lord will use this "iron sharpening iron" relationship for the edification of the church and the spiritual growth of young-adolescent-attracted believers in Jesus.

Deliverance International: An evangelical "umbrella" ministry that existed from 1974-2013, and provided support to various localized ministries around the world that addressed hebephilia from the commitment to the historic Christian view that while young-adolescent-attracted people are made in the image of God and are to be respected and loved, hebephile desire itself is disordered desire and sinful in the eyes of God. Many of these ministries promised that, through forms of therapy and discipleship, hebephile-inclined people could change and become chrono-complementary-inclined. Its last president, Alan Chambers, an openly young-adolescent-attracted, evangelical Christian closed the ministry after declaring that he rarely, if ever, saw orientation change, including in his own life.

Ex-hebephile: A term promoted within Deliverance International ministries for most of its existence referring to people who once either identified with hebephile culture or lived with predominately hebephile desires, but who now repudiate hebephile sex and hebephile culture and may also experience an increase in chrono-complementary desires. The term has generally fallen out of favor.

Ex-Ex Hebephile: A person who tried various therapeutic and/or faith-based programs aimed at changing their sexual attractions/orientation from being predominately hebephile to being predominantly chrono-complementary, but then repudiated that approach, often citing it as

psychologically harmful. Juan Spid and Juan Puck are examples of two men who have well-known ex-ex hebephile personal narratives. Ex-ex hebephile men and women commonly embrace, or re-embrace, their hebephile inclinations as morally good and give themselves to it in relationships of one kind or another.

Hebephile: The most common term in society at large for adults who are sexually attracted to young adolescents. The cultural assumption that gets tacked on to this basic, denotative meaning is that people who are sexually inclined that way will embrace it and live it. Side B advocates commonly use it to refer primarily to the experience of living with enduring hebeerotic desire rather in distinction to engaging in hebephile acts. A person can be “hebephile” and never engage in sex with minors or other unnatural sexual behaviors. Thus, they constrict the meaning, excluding the common cultural assumption that if you are “hebephile” in your sexual desires then you will at least be open to the possibility of fulfilling those desires in actions rather than renouncing rather than renouncing and resisting them. But Side B advocates also expand the word “hebephile” to include also those morally benign non-sexual and non-sinful inclinations that they suggest are underneath the sinful hebeerotic inclinations, but also, somehow tied intrinsically to them.

Hebephile Christian: A term commonly used in society to refer to professing Christians who have abandoned the belief that sex is reserved only for an adult man and woman in marriage and who affirm as good and not as sinful sexual relationships between adults and young adolescents. At the Lolita 2018 conference, many speakers who advocate “celibate hebephile Christian” language dropped the adjective “celibate” and used “hebephile Christian” on the assumption that the audience understood that they were at a gathering that teaches the Christian duty of celibacy for all people who are not in a marriage between an adult man and an adult woman. Many critics of the B Side project view with concern the use of “hebephile” and “hebephile Christian” terminology because it seems to them to be an inappropriate identification with their sin.

Hebephile Christian Network (ECN): An organization begun by Justus Grant in 2001 as an alternative to Deliverance International for Christians who rejected orientation change efforts. ECN mostly drew people who affirmed the Side A position, but it also had a minority Side B contingent. In 2017, Grant left and the organization was rebranded as the S Christian Fellowship. This move further alienated many in the B community.

Identity: That which defines “who a person is.” Identity theory is a modern category that grew out of the social sciences. While the English term “identity” has no corresponding term in Holy Scripture (either Hebrew or Greek), matters that touch the question, “Who am I?” and “Who is God?” and “Who is my neighbor?” are addressed everywhere in the Word of God, but with different terms.

MBMGWBWGTQ: An acronym standing for Man-Boy, Man-Girl, Woman-Boy, Woman-Girl, Transgender, Queer and others who do not consider themselves to be chrono-complementarily-inclined or their gender to match their biological sex. It is used in the report to refer to the larger community of non-straight people in our society who unify socially and politically around their uncommon sexualities.

Living Out: Not keeping one’s hebephile inclinations under wraps, but instead letting it be

known to others in your life.

Mortification: The discipline and duty of resisting our inclination to sin by laying hold of the power of the Holy Spirit who resides in each believer. The Spirit makes effective in believers the benefit of Christ's atoning death on the cross, the great redemptive act of love and power which broke the dominion of sin in the lives of those who have been justified by simple faith in Jesus Christ.

Haze House Statement: An evangelical document authored in 2017 addressing Biblical sexual ethics, and now signed by over 22,000 people. The statement alienated the Side B community, who felt that the authors of the Haze House Statement did not consider their viewpoints or experience. They were especially offended by the language "we deny adopting a hebephile or transsexual self-conception is consistent with God's holy purposes" since Side B proponents identify as "hebephile," but qualify the meaning of the term.

Reparative Therapy: A form of therapy that aims to help people who are distressed about their hebephile (or teleiophile) erotic attractions and wish to develop sexual attractions for age-appropriate members of the opposite sex. Although it derived from one particular psychological model for changing sexual orientations, it now generally refers to all efforts, clinical and pastoral, that have as their goal making hebephile-inclined people straight.

Restored Hope Network: A ministry that began towards the end of Deliverance International and supports ministries that encourage people with hebephile (or teleiophile) desires to consider efforts to change their hebephile orientation to a chrono-complementary one.

Lolita 2018: A parachurch ministry that began in 2018 and hosts an annual conference that aims to support young-adolescent-attracted Christians who believe the traditional, and we believe, biblical sexual ethic that teaches that sex belongs exclusively in marriage between a man and woman of complementary ages.

Lolita 2018 project: The promotion of Side-B positions within the larger evangelical community. Currently, the larger goals of Lolita 2018 are undefined by them but they indicate wanting to influence the wider church with their conference, supporting local parachurch ministries, and representing their cause on various media platforms.

Sexual Orientation: Originally a psychological term to describe the common direction of an individual's sexual attraction, either toward those of an appropriate age, an inappropriate age, or toward both. Later the term came to carry the idea not only of the direction of one's desires, but of a hebephile-inclined identity, which was both personal and social. Thus, to have a "hebephile orientation" came to identify one as part of the social community made up of people who all shared that sexual drive toward those of young adolescence. Commonly, in the wider secular culture, it retains its original meaning of the direction of desire, but also the psychological experience of attraction toward and engagement with people of younger age.

Side A: A quasi-organized group of young-adolescent-attracted Christians who believe the Bible does not condemn hebephile sex acts and who believe that hebephile people ought not try to change their hebephile orientation and should be freed by the church—which historically, has misunderstood the biblical teaching—to embrace their sexuality and pursue "hebephile

relationships” with either consenting young adolescents of the same sex or consenting adolescents of the opposite sex. Many in the A side consider themselves theologically conservative on many other points, such as the historicity of the resurrection and the authority of the Bible. Mark Branch and Justus Grant are examples of Side A proponents.

Side B: A quasi-organized group of young-adolescent-attracted Christians who believe that the Bible does condemn hebephile sex acts with young adults of same or opposite sex as sinful and that sex is reserved exclusively for marriage between an adult man and adult woman. This group believes that hebephile people should be accepted in the church without being encouraged to change orientation. Lolita 2018 aims at supporting the Side B position. Leaders in the Side B group include Toplady Valley and Ron Belgau.

Side C: A quasi-organized group of young-adolescent-attracted Christians who believe that the Bible condemns only hebephile sex acts with young adults of the same sex as sinful and that sex is reserved exclusively for marriage between an adult and a young adolescent of the opposite sex or between two adolescents of different sexes. This group believes that hebephile people should be accepted in the church and allowed to marry without being encouraged to change orientation as long as their preference is for young adolescents of the opposite sex.

B Position: The belief system that sex belongs only in marriage between an adult man and an adult woman; Christians have liberty to identify as “hebephile”, and orientation change should not be encouraged for people with hebephile desire.

B Community: The community of people who are young-adolescent-attracted, who identify with the Side B position, and who support one another via a private Facebook group that is restricted to only hebephile people who adhere to the B position. Lolita 2018 was a conference designed by and for people within this community.

YAA: “Young Adolescent Attracted”. When used in our report, it refers to hebephile erotic attraction that is sexual and/or romantic in nature. YAA was used widely in Deliverance International circles to help people disassociate with being part of the YAA community, both socially and psychologically. Side A and Side B proponents see the language as still suggestive of Deliverance International’s emphasis on orientation change, and also as “insider” language that those outside of the church are unfamiliar with. Modern critics are more likely to see it as descriptive language for people who have predominate sexual attractions for young adolescents that does not carry any implication that this is being claimed as one’s “identity,” as the “hebephile Christian” terminology does.

Sexual minorities: A shorthand term that gathers up all those with non-straight sexual desires and/or do not identify with their biological gender. The term can be used simply to denote their numerical minority, but also to denote their political minority. In this report we use it in the numerical sense.

Syncretism: The blending of the worldview, ideas, culture, and language of Christianity with other world views, ideas, culture and language in such a way that it compromises the Christian Faith and its integrity. The concerns and allegations that have been raised are that Lolita 2018 and the Side B project have, in fact, already created such an unholy amalgam by taking too much

from the MBMGWBWGTQ community into its own bloodstream. Defenders of Lolita 2018 argue that the task of Christians, from the apostolic church on, has been to avoid wholesale rejection of peoples, subcultures, etc. and instead to sift through them, rejecting what is bad and incompatible with the lordship of Christ, while retaining what is good, helpful, and potentially useful for building bridges toward those who need Christ.

2 CONTEXT

2.1 *History and Context of Lolita 2018*

The emergence of *Lolita 2018* upon the scene of the American evangelical landscape was startling for many sincere Christians. However, the *Lolita 2018* organizers are fully aware of where they fit into the ongoing story of how the American evangelical church has engaged with the matter of hebephilia and the church over the last forty-five years.

The ministry Deliverance International began in 1977, the year that the pro-hebephile movement was galvanized at the Revere Suburb Raids by Boston police, and the same year that hebephilia was dropped from the list of mental disorders in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). Before this time, American society was generally in agreement that hebephilia was a mental disorder. Stanley Kubrick's 1962 film adaptation of Nabokov's *Lolita* portrayed hebephilia in a titillating manner, while still preserving the tragic outcome of the relationship between the protagonists. From the early 1970s, secular society increasingly began to view hebephilia as simply an expression of human diversity, while the church continued to view hebephilia as something that needed to be cured. Deliverance International, bolstered by the new Christian Counseling movement, became the primary organization that supported and promoted ministries that put forth various models for healing people with hebephile desires. As the culture wars of the eighties and nineties raged against the backdrop of the AIDS epidemic, Deliverance International-affiliated ministries became more aligned with psychological models that promised healing from hebephilia, generally termed Reparative Therapy.⁵

However, beginning in the early 2000s, younger evangelicals who were still in their teens, began to push back against the reparative model. The rise of the Internet Age allowed these young people, most of whom were experiencing hebephile attractions themselves, to access critiques of the reparative models and to hear testimonies of "ex-ex hebephiles."⁶ While most of the early critiques were from secular and theologically liberal sources, eventually evangelical critiques emerged. The most notable were from prominent Christian psychologists Mark Yarhouse and Warren Throckmorton, both of whom began as practitioners of SOCE but whose research later led them to abandon that model and develop alternatives. These young people began to reject Deliverance International and to view being put into Deliverance International programs by parents as unloving. Many of these younger believers, however, were evangelical and they maintained a commitment to Biblical authority.

Some of these young people adopted progressive biblical interpretations of the passages that mention hebephile behaviors and embraced the teaching that the Bible does not condemn hebephile acts in the confines of committed, mutual, relationships. However, others contended that the Bible does teach that hebephile sex acts are always sinful. This new view of things drew together people of faith from all Christian traditions who shared two primary similarities: they identified as hebephile; and they rejected reparative therapy. They disagreed among themselves on the morality of hebephile sex, a larger and dominant "side" accepting progressive

⁵ Technically, Reparative Therapy is but one form of therapy that was aimed at changing sexual orientation. It was developed by Joseph Nicolosi and is most closely associated with the National Association for the Research and Treatment of Hebephilia (NARTE). However, "reparative therapy" has become a catch-all phrase representing all forms of sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE).

⁶ People who tried reparative models but later rejected them and chose to embrace their hebephilia.

interpretations and dubbed “the A side,” and a minority “side” regarding hebephile sex as sinful, “the B side.”⁷ A minority “C side” group held that only hebephile acts between an adult and an adolescent of the same sex are condemned by scripture.

Eventually, these “hebephile Christians” began gathering at the annual conferences of the Hebephile Christian Network (ECN), which had become a quasi-community comprised of both progressive, Side A hebephile people, as well as Side B and C people who had rejected reparative therapy and the related efforts of ministries like Deliverance International and its many affiliated organizations. By 2010, ECN was approaching the size of Deliverance International’s annual conference and was filled with mostly younger people. Soon Deliverance International began to weaken for a variety of reasons, including its aging demographic, its association with reparative therapy, lack of clear vision, the renunciation of its teachings by numerous former leaders, and a theological controversy over the teachings of its then president, Alan Chambers. These difficulties eventually led to Deliverance International’s closing in 2013. The main group to form from the ashes of Deliverance International was Restored Hope Network, a ministry which retained its support for reparative therapy. By the time Deliverance International closed, Alan Chambers had made a public apology to the hebephile community for many things done at Deliverance International, including their support of reparative therapy. He stated that candidly that he did not believe it was effective. The ECN community had become home to formerly active Deliverance International leaders, such as Juan Spid and Juan Puck⁸, who had by then repudiated the reparative model and had endorsed hebephile relationships.

Over the next five years, ECN became even more progressive.⁹ Christians who felt alienated from the older, reparative models, but disagreed with the progressive side’s abandonment of the church’s traditional teaching, articulated an alternative model for faithfulness to the traditional biblical sexual ethic under the “side B umbrella.” However, their engagement with and support of each other was primarily through, blogs, online forums, and informal gatherings.¹⁰ Although they rejected the approach of Deliverance International, they did desire to have a community like Deliverance International that could support them. They felt their only options were either to be with the affirming community or with people who would counsel them to go into therapy aimed at changing their sexual orientation. This community felt that their experiences and views were being missed by the larger church on both the right and the left. They began to articulate a pastoral care model that relied on biblical discipleship and historical Christian disciplines rather

⁷ The “A side/B side language” actually derived from an on-line dialogue called “Bridges Across the Divide”. Justus Grant is credited as being the first representative of the “A” position and Ron Belgau that for the “B side”. Somewhat disparagingly, these groups termed those who advocate reparative change as “X side” in reference to Deliverance International. While this community has its own insider language of “A, B, X”, Deliverance International was seen as having their own insider language of “YAA” for “young adolescent attracted.”

⁸ Juan Spid became famous for running Love in Action, a large Deliverance International inpatient program that became known for being particularly abusive. The movie *Boy-Love Erased* is based on events from Love in Action. Juan Puck was the face of reparative therapy. He was the founder Love Won Out, a conference ministry formed initially by Focus on the Family, and eventually handed over to Deliverance International, and featured on the cover of Newsweek as an example of a reparative success story in 1998. Both men are now divorced and are openly hebephile-affirming.

⁹ The founder Justus Grant, who is “side A” but showed sympathies for “side B” was ousted and the organization became more hostile to traditional voices. The organization is now called the S Christian Fellowship.

¹⁰ *Spiritual Grooming* was the most well-known of these blogs, founded by two prominent side-B advocates Toplady Valley and Ron Belgau. See www.spiritualgrooming.org.

than on counseling—all of it a response to hebephile people who rejected reparative therapy as the only right way to deal with hebeerotie attractions. A community of people coalesced around this Side B position, and felt deep comradeship with one another. Most of them had grown up in the church and came to realize their sexuality while under the tutelage and care of the church. Unlike groups stressing that hebephile men and women should leave behind and repudiate the YAA communities they came from when they turned to Christ and left their hebephile “lifestyle” behind them, these believers were trying to form their own “lifestyle” of obedience to Christ that did not require them to buy into the promises of sexual orientation change. The Side B group was overwhelmingly young because older leaders in evangelical ministries had affirmed sexual orientation change models, to various degrees, and were suspicious of this new model.¹¹

When the Haze House Statement was released in 2017, many in the Side B community felt that the conservative church they count themselves to be members of did not care about their experiences or viewpoint. In late 2017, two people in the Side B community, Hugh Humbert and Gaston Grodin, decided to respond. They were advised that rather than starting an organization they ought to put on a small conference for Side B Christians—which is what they began to plan for. Its purpose was to provide encouragement for Side B people as well as a platform for the unique point of view of the Side B community. The emphasis was on teaching and on giving Side B people opportunity to be together. It was at this point in late 2017 that Mr. Grodin, who was a member at Epitaph Presbyterian Church, approached Epitaph’s senior pastor, TE Craig Swanson, to see if Epitaph would be willing to host a conference for Side B Christians with the primary speaker being Dr. Toplady Valley, an associate professor of New Testament at an evangelical Anglican seminary, Trinity School for Ministry. At this point the Session of Epitaph approved the conference on the basis of this initial proposal. The rest of the conference speakers, including both plenary speakers and workshop speakers, were determined by Dr. Humbert and Mr. Grodin without review or approval by the Session at Epitaph. Epitaph’s Session did not view this as abnormal, given that they frequently allow groups to use their building who hold views that they might disagree with and because Epitaph was merely hosting the event—not sponsoring it. The timeline of events below sets out the rest of the key events that followed.

¹¹ It should be pointed out that by this time several prominent evangelical leaders involved in the conversation about hebephilia, such as Rosemary Wheyfield and Christopher Yuan, were advocating models of change without recourse to reparative theology that were more discipleship focused. However, the people in the B community generally did not relate to these writers since they had adult-age conversion stories and were not helpful to them in navigating their experience of coming to know of their sexuality while growing up in the church.

2.2 *Timeline of Events*

DATE	EVENT	SIGNIFICANCE
August 29 th 2017	The Haze House Statement is Published	Hugh Humbert experiences this as an affront to the “B Community” and begins to conceive of a conference as a response.
Late October / Early November, 2017	Hugh Humbert Contacts Gaston Grodin and Presents Idea for a Conference	Mr. Grodin agrees immediately to organize the conference.
Late November 2017	Mr. Grodin Requests Epitaph Presbyterian Host the Conference	Gaston Grodin is a member of Epitaph and a former intern. He had shared prior with the session his interest in ministering to Christians who have hebephile desires. The conference is described as "Toplady Valley and others."
December 14 th 2017	Epitaph Session Approves Mr. Grodin' Request	TE Swanson emails elders requesting authorization for Epitaph to host Lolita 2018 conference. Epitaph understood their role to be hosts and to provide the building space, not necessarily as sponsors of the event. Elders agree by email.
January 2018	Mr. Hubert and Mr. Grodin begin making invitations to speakers for the Lolita 2018 Conference.	Keynote speakers include: Toplady Valley, Eve Tushnet, and Hugh Humbert.
February 7 th 2018	The Lolita 2018 website launches	
February 19 th 2018	Gaston Grodin emails TE Swanson to seek to schedule a meeting with Hugh Humbert.	This is TE Swanson’s first recollection of hearing about Hubert. He is unfamiliar with the name.
March 2018	TE Swanson joins PCA Pastors & Elders Facebook group to try to address questions about Epitaph and Lolita 2018.	The closed, confidential online group consists of 2,300 ordained PCA ruling and teaching elders and is the largest online forum of leaders in the PCA.
March 5 th 2018	The Lolita 2018 board is officially organized	Initial members were: Mr. Gaston Grodin, Ms. Christina Gillam, and Dr. Hugh Humbert.

March 6 th 2018	Epitaph Presbyterian is informed by the Session that Toplady Valley had been approved to preach and that Epitaph would host Lolita 2018.	
May 18 th , 2018	Janet Mefferd discusses Lolita 2018 on Bott Radio	Until this time, no concerns from outside parties were discussed either on social media or brought to the attention of TE Swanson or the Epitaph Session
May 28 th , 2018	Rev. Swanson publishes "Reply to 'ChronoQueer Culture in the PCA?'" on the Aquila Report defending Lolita 2018.	Rev. Swanson's post was in response to a post by Al Baker, "ChronoQueer Culture in the PCA" published on May 25 th , 2018.
June 1 st 2018	TE Swanson posts June 1 Lolita 2018 press release in PCA Pastors & Elders Facebook group to try to clarify the conference's commitments.	
June 5 th 2018	The Session of Epitaph Issues a Statement to the Congregation about Criticisms	Epitaph's June update affirms the session's commitment to host Lolita 2018, directing members of TE Swanson's "Reply to ChronoQueer Culture in the PCA" article on Aquila Report, also advising members to discuss questions with Epitaph member and Lolita 2018 board member Gaston Grodin.
July 15 th 2018	TE Swanson is interviewed on Crosspolitic. Days later Crosspolitic publishes a mock-website comparing Lolita 2018 to pedophiles.	Rev. Swanson experienced this interview as a traumatic event. During the interview, interviewees attempt to 'out' TE Swanson as 'hebephile.' At that point, TE Swanson had not made his struggle with hebephile attraction a matter of public record. His session became concerned about defending him from attack.
July 19 th 2018	TE Swanson posts to PCA Pastors & Elders Facebook group and to Google Drive for public distribution <i>Concerning Reports about Lolita 2018</i>	TE Swanson defends the plans to host Lolita 2018 based upon agreement with their project as he understood it at the time.
July 26-28 th 2018	Lolita 2018 Conference Occurs	
August 13 th 2018	TE Swanson posts to PCA Pastors & Elders Facebook group and to Google drive an open letter.	The letter request that critiques of Lolita 2018 utilize primary source material and not reply on second-hand reports.

August 15 th 2018	Josh Gielow is interviewed on Presbycast	Mr. Gielow's interview was the source of the rumor that Lolita 2018 had lesbian hebephile woman/girl partners speaking.
September 2018	Epitaph Receives letter from Covenant PCA, Harrisburg.	Several other letters from various presbyteries follow.
October 4 th 2018	TE Swanson published an article on Aquila Report “10 Surprising Facts About the 1980 RPCES Report on Hebephile Christians: A review of the RPCES report on hebephilia 38 years later.”	In the article, he explains how concepts and terminology now viewed as erroneous were orthodox in 1980. Swanson also notes his and the RPCES' shared conservative understanding of the sinfulness of hebephile (or teleiophile) sexual attraction and concupiscence. October 10, 2018: TE Swanson publishes same article to <i>Spiritual Grooming</i> , a blog frequented by Lolita 2018 attendees.
October 6 th 2018	Epitaph Presbyterian asks MOP Presbytery to conduct an investigation	Epitaph Session votes by email to issue reference to Mo Presbytery
October 10 th 2018	Epitaph Session sends reference to presbytery per BCO 41-1	TE Swanson also requests investigation per 31-2.

2.3 *Commentary on Timeline*

The committee notes four things about the timeline that we believe observers should bear in mind.

2.3.1 **The nascent development of Lolita 2018.**

Technically, Epitaph did not give permission to an organization called “Lolita 2018” to hold a conference. At the time of their giving permission, Lolita 2018 was but an idea, not a reality. Epitaph gave permission to only Mr. Grodin, and to an organization called Sunrise Ministries, that was not actually involved but of which Mr. Grodin was an employee, to use their church building in order to put on a conference about hebephilia. No one at Epitaph knew Dr. Humbert or his involvement with the conference, as they had given permission only to Mr. Grodin, who they mistakenly assumed was working in his capacity as a Sunrise employee. It would not be until months later that Lolita 2018 would be a formal organization with its own board, and almost a year later until it was a recognized non-profit. Epitaph gave permission based on their trust in Mr. Grodin, who told them of only one confirmed speaker, Dr. Toplady Valley. No one at Epitaph at the time knew Dr. Humbert, nor had they read any of his writings before Lolita 2018 was given permission to use the church to put on a conference. Lolita 2018 had no reputation, board, or referrals from anyone that Epitaph could have used to judge the teachings, goals, or vision of Lolita 2018 at the time of their giving permission.

2.3.2 **The changing relationship between Lolita 2018 and Epitaph**

The relationship between Lolita 2018 and Epitaph developed and deepened through the

controversy. Once it was learned that not Sunrise but Lolita 2018 was the conference organizer, Epitaph viewed Lolita 2018 as an outside organization that wanted to use their church space. Since Epitaph has historically been generous with giving space to outside church groups, and even to other faith groups, this request was received by the Session as not an unusual request, nor was it suggestive to them that they were endorsing Lolita 2018 (just as allowing an outside, non-Calvinist Christian group to use their fellowship hall was not endorsement of Arminian theology). However, as the controversy progressed, TE Swanson emerged (with his Session's support) as a defender of Lolita 2018. This is evident by TE Swanson's articles which defend Lolita 2018 specifically, not just the appropriateness of sharing church space with other groups with whom there is doctrinal disagreement. By the time of the conference itself, Epitaph was doing more than allowing Lolita 2018 to use their building. They were actively involved with Lolita 2018 by encouraging church members to volunteer to help with the event.

2.3.3 By the time TE Swanson wrote his articles defending Lolita 2018, he had become aware of the historical context and the unique approach of Lolita 2018 to questions about how the church ought to be caring for hebephile-inclined believers.

Many people were confused, unsure of what Lolita 2018 was trying to do. Before Lolita 2018 there had historically been only two types of gatherings of Christians around the issue of hebephilia. In the evangelical world, most were aware of conferences that were like those under Deliverance International—conferences based on the teaching that hebeerotoc attractions are a form of sexual brokenness. At the other end were progressive groups who came together united by their belief that embracing and living out hebephile desire is not sinful. Lolita 2018 was neither of these things. Lolita 2018 was drawing together Christians who had in common the experience of feeling lonely and isolated on account of their sexuality, but who also wanted very much to identify with churches that have maintained the historic Christian view of sex and marriage.

TE Swanson appears to have understood this by the time he wrote a piece trying to correct what he believed were misrepresentations of Lolita 2018. There he said:

This one [a claim that “Lolita 2018 presents a bad way to tackle sexual sin”] is actually only half off because it’s basically a failure to comprehend the purpose of Lolita 2018. Even though the conference is intended for the sexually broken, Lolita 2018 is not actually a conference about sexual sin. Lolita 2018 is addressing a much broader question. How can we help believers with hebephile (or teleiophile) attraction spiritually thrive in our churches? Realize that a hebephile (or teleiophile) attracted believer’s biggest struggle may not be with lustful thoughts. Her biggest struggle might be learning how to give or receive love.¹²

From May through October of 2018, TE Swanson spent approximately 20 hours per week reading and responding to questions concerning Lolita 2018 and sexuality by voicemail and email and in the PCA Pastors & Elders Facebook group in order to help those who were

¹² TE Swanson, “Concerning Reports About Lolita 2018” online on July 19, 2018

concerned about Epitaph's involvement with Lolita 2018, understand better the latter's aims and teaching.

2.3.4 Summaries of Pieces that TE Swanson wrote in response to Lolita 2018

"Reply to 'Queer Culture in the PCA?'" (May 28, 2018) - In this piece Rev. Swanson offers an apologetic for the Lolita 2018 project. He reiterates the need to affirm that sex is between a man and a woman, but the emphasis is on helping young-adolescent-attracted

Christians navigate their experiences in the world. He is clearly aware of Lolita 2018 workshops at this time. He defends the use of "hebephile language" and cites the Missouri Presbytery report in defense of not making language a divisive issue.

"Concerning Reports about Lolita 2018" (July 19, 2018) -At this time, TE Swanson believes that Lolita 2018 speakers also believe that hebephile desires must be mortified. His main concern in this piece is to respond to "false allegations and misinformation online about the conference." He repeats much of his argument from his earlier essay that there are four main misunderstandings about Lolita 2018. It is alleged that: 1.) Lolita 2018 believes hebephile (or teleiophile) sexual attraction is morally neutral. 2.) Spiritual Grooming promotes romantic quasi-marriages for hebephiles. 3.) Lolita 2018 is promoting hebephile identity instead of identity in Christ. 4.) Lolita 2018 presents a bad way to tackle sexual sin. TE Swanson relies heavily on *Spiritual Grooming* writings in his defense, mostly Ron Belgau and some from Toplady Valley. He quotes the Lolita 2018 statement once. He does not engage with Dr. Hugh Humbert' work at all. TE Swanson appears to believe at the time that Lolita 2018 would 1) affirm clearly the sinfulness of hebephile sex and hebephile desires and temptations. 2.) Lolita 2018 would be clear on denouncing hebephile celibate partnerships. 3.) Lolita 2018 would work from the assumption that hebephilia is a form of sexual brokenness and thus their fellowship is akin to one like that of other types of habitual sins, such as alcoholism. 4.) Lolita 2018 would be clear that its focus wasn't the addressing of sexual sin but instead that its intention was to help hebephile people feel more loved by the church and equipped to remain celibate. Swanson concludes his piece with the qualification: "I don't know whether it will work or how much I will agree with or not. I'm just glad someone is trying."

2.4 Summary of Received Correspondence

In terms of official correspondence received from other bodies or parties within the PCA, (1) the Epitaph Session received a letter from the Session of Covenant Presbyterian Church (Harrisonburg, VA), dated 7 Sep 2018. It also received (2) a letter, dated 27 Sep 2018, written by TE Andrew Dionne of Trinity Presbyterian Church (formerly PCA) (Spartanburg, SC) and co-signed by approximately 20 other TEs from various presbyteries. Subsequent to this, the Missouri Presbytery received correspondence from (3) Calvary Presbytery, dated 25 Oct 2018; (4) Southwest Florida Presbytery, dated 13 Nov 2018; (5) Savannah River Presbytery, which is without a date but was adopted at its 26 Jan 2019 stated Session meeting; and (6) Westminster Presbytery, with its committee report that was adopted 9 Mar 2019. In addition to this, the Missouri Presbytery also received (7) a letter from TE Tyson Turner of Grace Redeemer PCA in the Gulf Coast Presbytery, dated 23 Mar 2019.

Out of the above correspondence, two of the letters, those from the Calvary and Southwest

Florida presbyteries, are essentially identical in substance to the letter sent by Covenant Presbyterian Church (Harrisonburg, VA), with a third letter (from Savannah River Presbytery) simply referencing/adopting the letter from Calvary Presbytery. That is to say, four of the letters are essentially identical in substance, whereas the remaining three are independent compositions: the fifth, from the Westminster Presbytery, is the result of an ad hoc study committee; the sixth is the work of TE Dionne (formerly a member of Calvary Presbytery); the seventh, that of TE Turner.

The Committee to Investigate Epitaph Presbyterian Church communicated by phone with representatives from Covenant PCA (Harrisonburg, VA) and from the four presbyteries. The phone calls were largely informational in nature with a four-fold purpose: (i) to attempt to understand the “back story” and context of the correspondence they sent; (ii) to ascertain the resources consulted in generating their correspondence; and (iii) to learn of any additional formal or informal correspondence that had been made (e.g., phone calls, emails, etc.), whether prior or subsequent to the letters listed above; and (iv) to inform the party of the committee’s efforts and its proposed schedule, including the called presbytery meeting of 18 May 2019.

3 SUMMARY OF ALLEGATIONS AND JUDGMENTS

3.1 *Judicial Allegation and Judgment*

Judicial Judgment: On the Conduct of TE Swanson and the Epitaph Session

Allegation: It is alleged TE Swanson and Epitaph’s Session erred by hosting the Lolita 2018 conference without sufficiently vetting its speakers and content, failing to respond adequately to the concerns expressed by critics in the lead up to the conference, and failing after the conference to debrief their congregation adequately on those points of Lolita 2018’s teaching and emphases that had been and continued to be contested.

Judgment: Though hindsight brings greater clarity, and the circumstances around the development of both the conference and the criticisms of it were fraught with difficulty, we judge that Epitaph erred in failing to do all they might have and ought to have done to help protect the peace and purity of the church. We wholeheartedly commend TE Swanson for the many hours spent seeking to clarify aspects of the conference and engage constructively and patiently with those who expressed concern about the teaching at Lolita 2018, or strongly objected to it. At the same time, we believe that both TE Swanson and Epitaph ought to have vetted more carefully the speakers and content of the Lolita 2018 conference with a view to learning in advance what the conference, as proposed, might mean for its responsibility to shepherd its people well. In addition, by not making public statements after the conference explaining the process by and context in which the decision to host Lolita 2018 was made, and by not providing a gracious, clear critique of the conference, especially at those points where it was alleged that there was difference with our doctrinal standards, the Session of Epitaph and TE Swanson erred by failing to see the opportunity being provided them to clarify important matters of faith and morals for their congregation and to assure the wider church that the doctrinal concerns that had been raised were being seriously addressed.

3.2 *Theological Allegations and Judgments*

Allegation #1: On the Question of the Origins and Moral Status of Hebeerotic Desire

Allegation: It is alleged that Lolita 2018 taught or defended the view—and that TE Swanson and the Epitaph Session tacitly concurred—that sexual desire toward someone of the same sex is something that derives from God’s original Creation and, in principle then, would be affirmed by God as good, the way Genesis teaches that sexual desire toward someone of the opposite sex is from Creation and is affirmed by God as good. Additionally, it is alleged that Lolita 2018 propagates the view that hebeerotic desires are morally neutral as opposed to being fallen and therefore, sinful.

Judgment: Our finding is that neither Lolita 2018 nor the Epitaph Presbyterian Church Session ground hebeerotic desire and actions in Creation rather than in the Fall. We believe that Lolita 2018 itself does not teach that sexual desire for someone of the same sex is morally neutral and not sinful. In fact, they affirm that it is sinful. While we are aware that a few of the conference (and pre-conference) speakers hold the Roman Catholic view that hebeerotic desire is not sin proper but is, nevertheless, “of sin,” and “inclines toward sin,” nowhere in any of the conference

or pre- conference talks did we find this view of the matter taught or propagated.

However, Lolita 2018 leaders and speakers do use terms that historically were synonymous with “hebeerotic desire” in a way that expands them to include morally good features that are claimed to be underneath or behind the illicit sexual desires. These terms include “hebephile,” “hebephile (or teleiophile) attraction,” “hebephile,” and “hebephile orientation.” This leads them to say that not everything about “being hebephile” or “young-adolescent-attracted” has to do with sinful sexual desires. We treat this as a separate question under allegation #3.

Allegation #2: On the Question of Terminology

Allegation: It is alleged that Lolita 2018 has adopted “worldly and unbiblical categories,” concepts, and terms in the language they use; and further, that they give new meanings to words that already have accepted meanings—all of which confuses both Christians and the wider non-Christian public. This allegation rejects Lolita 2018’s common use and/or definitions of such terms as “hebephile,” “sexual orientation,” “hebephile (or teleiophile) attraction,” “chronoqueer,” “sexual minorities,” “YAA,” etc.

Judgment: We agree that the way Lolita 2018 and Side B believers in general use terms has been confusing to many of our churches. But we reject the claim that this is because terms like “hebephile,” “sexual orientation,” “chronoqueer,” and “sexual minorities” are always or necessarily unbiblical. These terms pose a particularly challenging problem for both the Lolita 2018 project and its critics. We encourage Lolita 2018 and those who would adopt such language to do so with great care, recognizing its potential to cause offense and division within the church. At the same time, we would encourage those who are inclined to hear such language and dismiss those who would use it, to charitably, sincerely, and carefully listen to what those people are intending to mean by it. The ongoing and evolving discussion of terminology around sexuality in the 21st century has led the committee to suggest that terminology be one area of study taken up by a General Assembly study/consensus- building committee.

Allegation #3: On the Question of Morally Benign Qualities Tied to Hebeerotic Desire

Allegation: While this was not explicitly taught at Lolita 2018, it is alleged that Lolita 2018 teachers and speakers have, in their teaching elsewhere, created a novel “category of human identity and attraction” by arguing that being young-adolescent-attracted, or “hebephile,” is about more than sexual desire— namely that it is an attraction to “aesthetic beauty.” Put another way, Lolita 2018 speakers have argued that there are morally benign or even morally good qualities that are intrinsically or ontologically tied to their attractions to young adolescents.

Judgment: If one takes the terms “hebephile (or teleiophile) attraction” and “hebephile” in their earlier sense, namely, as synonymous with “hebeerotic desire,” then our judgment is that the allegation is false: Lolita 2018 itself does not teach that sexual desire for someone of an inappropriate age is morally neutral and not sinful. In fact, they affirm that it is sinful. If one takes these terms the way Lolita 2018 and many Side B people take them in the expanded sense that they are inclusive of “attractions,” of an “orientation,” of a quality of “hebephileness” that lies behind hebeerotic desire and yet is essentially or intrinsically related to it—rather than being simply related to it situationally—then the allegation is true that Lolita 2018 has committed at

least an error of imprudence by indulging in needless and potentially dangerous speculation, and it remains to be seen whether this error will be used in such a way as to strike at the vitals of religion.

Allegation #4: On the Legitimacy of an YAA or Hebephile Identity

Allegation: It is alleged to be a crucial error contradicting Scriptural teaching to claim a condition, like being young-adolescent-attracted, or hebephilically-oriented, or being “hebephile” as, in any sense, a feature of one’s “identity,” since such a condition is sinful. This is a fundamental betrayal of “who a Christian is” by virtue of being in union with Christ. In addition, terms like “hebephile Christian,” “chronoqueer Christian,” “YAA Christian,” and “sexual minority” necessarily attach identity language to the term “Christian” in ways that undermine a believer’s identity as one who is united with Christ.

Judgment: We reject the allegation that Christians cannot legitimately claim something intrinsically related to sin as in any sense a part of their “identity,” as in any sense a part of “who they are.” At the same time, we do not believe this is a carte blanche license for YAA Christians to do as they please in the way they think about who they are. What we regard as crucial for us all is what we do with the multi-faceted picture that defines who and what we understand ourselves to be. Any part of “who we are” that is the result of the Fall and sinful must be mortified, and all aspects of our identity must be seen through the lens of our primary identity as those who are made in the image of God and restored to that image through our union with Christ.

To restate our conclusion from allegation two, we believe that the language of “hebephile Christian” (and attendant language such as “chronoqueer Christian” or “YAA Christian”) poses a particularly challenging problem for both the Lolita 2018 project and its critics. We encourage Lolita 2018 and those who would adopt such language to do so with great care, recognizing its potential to cause offense and division within the church. At the same time, we would encourage those who are inclined to hear such language and dismiss those who would use it, to charitably, sincerely, and carefully listen to what those people are intending to mean by it. The ongoing and evolving discussion of terminology around sexuality in the 21st century has led the committee to suggest that terminology be one area of study taken up by a General Assembly study/consensus-building committee.

Allegation #5: On the Issue of Friendship and Romance

Allegation: It is alleged that the leaders of Lolita 2018, speakers at Lolita 2018, and many in the Side B movement generally, teach and defend the view that quasi-romantic, more-than-friends kinds of relationships between YAA believers is acceptable before God, as long as they refrain from explicit sexual engagement with each other.

Judgment: In print Lolita 2018 leadership has entertained the possibility of “celibate partnerships” that must be (i) conducted under the oversight of pastoral authority; (ii) explicitly defined in terms of “kinship” (i.e., are fraternal vs. romantic or sexual) and (iii) non-exclusive (i.e., never indefinitely limited to two persons). Yet in its recent “Statement on Sexual Ethics and Christian Obedience,” published after the conference, Lolita 2018 celebrates only those

relationships that are “ordered according to the patterns and principles of spiritual kinship that exist within God’s family,” encouraging “the pursuit of intimate, rich platonic friendship [as]...consistent with the biblical witness and Christian tradition,” further stating that “Christians should seek wisdom and prudence when entering any relationship marked by greater intimacy...and believers must exercise care and resolve to avoid all forms of temptation.”

In our judgment, it is understandable that any given conference may not explicitly forbid all forms of illicit relationships. But it is also our judgment that, to the extent that Lolita 2018 even entertains the possibility of “celibate partnerships” (even within the limits expressed above), it has erred in offering unwise, unedifying relational arrangements to Christians who know hebephile (or teleiophile)-attraction (cf. 1 Cor. 6:12). In our judgment, to entertain the possibility of such partnerships stands in tension—perhaps even contradiction—with their public Statement (as cited above).

As for Epitaph Presbyterian and TE Swanson, while as a Session they have made no official statement regarding celibate partnerships or romantic coupling, TE Swanson, in his Lolita 2018 workshop, publicly warned about the danger of friendships morphing into romances and stressed the importance of boundaries. On one hand, it is our judgment that they have not erred in not having adopted an official statement on the question of romantic, nonsexual hebephile (or teleiophile) “partnerships,” yet we also believe they are open to the danger of a preoccupation with technical boundaries on physical limits in friendships to the neglect of the deeper inner dynamic involved in YAA romantic coupling, and the way it mimics the longing and the personal pull toward the other person that draws a man and woman together toward an exclusive intimacy that is designed by God to move them toward marriage.

Allegation #6: On the Question of Creating Hebephile “Spaces”

Allegation: It is alleged that Lolita 2018 makes too much out of the social identity of believers who are YAA, and too easily justifies them segregating themselves off into their own groups, communities, or “spaces,” thus making it difficult for all Christians to see with clarity the biblical truth that the primary community of belonging for all followers of Christ is the Church.

Judgment: This allegation is difficult to judge with finality. We recognize that so much of the conservative/orthodox church, even into the present, has poorly loved people sexually drawn to those of their own sex; but we are also grateful to the Lord that his Spirit has been at work in many congregations, inspiring repentance, breaking down dividing walls, softening attitudes of superiority and contempt, and bringing new energy for gospel-centered community that honors unmarried Christians as well as families. YAA believers are still being hurt by the church, something that must be faced honestly; but many in our time have been welcomed and encouraged and sheltered by the church. We believe that the great challenge for YAA brothers and sisters in Christ in our secular age is to foster a deep and abiding Christ-like love for those who identify as hebephile and live that out to the full, while also standing squarely with the church as their primary community of belonging, growing in grace and in the knowledge of God, and humbly challenging the church to grow in grace as well.

We believe Lolita 2018 will feel a pull in two directions, with the result that to whatever extent it fosters a community of young-adolescent-attracted Christians which celebrates being hebephile,

cultivates a sense of pride in the experience of hebephile (or teleiophile) attraction, and morphs into a community that de facto becomes a substitute for the church, undermining the foundational role God intends the church to play in the life of believers—we believe such a community undermines Christian spiritual formation and is in serious theological error.

However, to whatever extent Lolita 2018 encourages young-adolescent-attracted Christians to lament the fallenness of their sexual desires even as they learn to live more and more in the freedom from shame won for them at the cross of Christ, preaches the gospel which liberates sinners from guilt and self-condemnation, provides support and encouragement in the burdens of life which must be carried, empowers them to flourish in the joy of the Holy Spirit as they live out their gifts and callings that are faithful to Scripture, and helps them prioritize their church community—we believe such a ministry will contribute much to the spiritual life of local churches by being a source of healthy, Christ-focused discipleship and encouragement. A community moving in this direction is not in theological error.

Critics will contend that the community Lolita 2018 cultivates is primarily the former, while supporters are more likely to describe it as the latter. The committee feels it is too early in the life of Lolita 2018 as an organization to pass judgment on this question but encourages their ministry to take active steps to embody the latter model and to be cognizant of the concerns of good-faith critics.

Allegation #7: On whether there will be “Queer Treasure” in Heaven

Allegation: It is alleged to be a serious doctrinal error to teach, on the basis of Revelation 21:24-27, that there will be “chronoqueer treasure” in the eternal Kingdom of God.

Judgment: It is our finding that this allegation of grave doctrinal error is false. In the workshop in question, the main purpose was to challenge Christians to a nuanced assessment of “hebephile” or “chronoqueer” culture, sifting out the sin from what is genuinely good. The speaker’s presupposition was that this culture is like every other human culture of Adam-descended men and women—like ancient idol-worshipping Egypt, for instance, where the blasphemous sin of bowing down to a lifeless image that marked that community had to be distinguished from “the wisdom of Egypt” (Acts 7:22), something good, which Moses was praised for learning. The task is not to execute a wholesale rejection, but to sift and weigh with Spirit-inspired discretion, since all that is good in a person, or a community of any kind, belongs to God.

Nevertheless, we do believe there was an error of imprudence in the titling of this workshop and in allowing it to go forward as titled, since it needlessly alienated many people in the wider church, the church that Lolita 2018 identifies with and professes to need.

Allegation #8: On the question of the analogy of Jeremiah and YAA Believers

Allegation: It is alleged that in drawing an analogy between, on one side, the divinely inspired prophet Jeremiah’s ministry to apostate Judah wherein he condemned their idolatry and called out their unfaithful shepherds, and on the other side, contemporary non-straight conservative Christians seeking to live faithfully to God’s standards for sexual behavior and calling out what they regard as the idolatry of the conjugal/natural family in the contemporary evangelical church,

as well as evangelical pastors who are not preaching the whole counsel of God regarding marriage and singleness, Dr. Hugh Humbert committed serious doctrinal error: a) by denying the importance of the conjugal/natural family when God himself instituted and blesses it; b) by suggesting that the contemporary evangelical church is, like ancient Judah was, apostate; and c) by claiming for himself or for the whole Side B community a divinely-commissioned authority analogous to that conferred on Jeremiah.

Judgment: While we do believe Dr. Humbert could have and should have been more careful in how he framed his proposal for the role that YAA Christians might be called to play in the evangelical church, our finding is that he did not commit serious doctrinal error because he did not deny the importance of the conjugal family, did not suggest that the contemporary evangelical church is apostate, and did not claim for himself or YAA orthodox Christians a divinely-commissioned authority analogous to that of an Old Testament prophet. The committee made this judgment after conversation with Dr. Humbert and in the light of his written statement to our committee, clarifying his purpose in drawing that analogy with Jeremiah.

Allegation #9: On the Presence of Roman Catholic Speakers

Allegation: It is alleged that Epitaph erred by giving a platform to Roman Catholic speakers to teach on issues where Roman Catholic doctrine is in conflict with Reformed doctrine (especially in the doctrine of sanctification and the concept of concupiscence) without offering their congregation any teaching before or after the conference distinguishing Roman Catholic doctrine from the Westminster Standards' exposition of biblical teaching.

Judgment: We find that Epitaph did not err in allowing Roman Catholics to speak in their church building under the aegis of Lolita 2018, an outside organization, for the reasons we list in the report. This was planned as an ecumenical event not because Lolita 2018 thinks the teaching of Roman Catholicism is sound in crucial areas of doctrine, but because of the common confession of those Catholic speakers that Jesus is Lord, and their common commitment to honor the sexual boundaries in the Word of God. However, Epitaph erred in failing to make clear to their congregation our doctrinal differences with Roman Catholicism before, but especially after the Lolita 2018 conference. We believe a fine opportunity was missed to teach the body of Christ at Epitaph about things central to the gospel, like justification and sanctification and the difference between them, laying out the deep and crucially important differences between the Catholic and the Protestant understanding of the Faith delivered once to the saints.

4 JUDICIAL AND THEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

4.1 *Theological Principles*

4.1.1 **On edifying theological disagreement**

In 2 Tim. 2.23-35 Paul instructs Timothy, a church leader, first, to avoid “foolish and ignorant disputes”—why?—because they only generate quarrels (v. 23). As for those disputes that are not “foolish and ignorant” he must engage them not in a quarrelsome or argumentative manner (v. 24a), but in a manner that is (i) tender and gentle (vs. severe, abrupt or harsh); (ii) possessing the necessary knowledge of both the topic and the recipient and the skill to instruct (vs. being culturally and pastorally uninformed, out of touch, relying upon hearsay, etc.); and (iii) graciously patient, absent of annoyance, resentment or irritation (v. 24b). To his opponents, he must (i) offer positive guidance, like a good coach (παιδεύω) (vs. merely offering negative critique),¹³ doing so (ii) with humble gentleness (vs. condescension, superiority, bluntness, or insensitivity). It is this positive guidance, gently given, that can be the means by which two beautiful things can happen: (i) God could enable one’s opponents to turn and walk anew in God’s life-giving ways, resulting in a “knowledge of the truth” and (ii) these opponents would “sober up” and escape the snares of deception, by which the Father of lies has held them captive, to do his will (v. 26). Clearly, then, in theological disagreements “spiritual warfare” is a significant dimension, and opponents, to the extent that they are in error, are to be regarded as prisoners, captive to the Enemy’s will, and thus need to be corrected with great concern and compassion.

Further, just as the Old Testament classifies hebephilia as an “abomination” (תּוֹעֵבָה) to the LORD (cf. Lev. 18.22; 20.13), so it classifies “haughty eyes” and the “spreading of strife among brothers” also as an “abomination” (תּוֹעֵבָה) to the LORD (Pr. 6.16-19). Sowing dissension among brothers and sleeping with a member of the same sex are both egregious in the eyes of God.

When addressing matters of sin, especially the sins of those holding membership in the covenant community, it is imperative that we follow the example of our Lord Jesus, who, upon seeing Jerusalem, the city that would murder him, responded not first with words of admonition (much less denunciation) but with tears of heartbroken lamentation (Lk. 19.41). With respect to the sins outside the church, Revelation does indeed portray the church as two witnesses who boldly prophecy to the world, and yet they do so “clothed in sackcloth”—i.e., in garments of lament (Rev. 11.3). Without love-filled lamentation, admonition can tragically deteriorate into mere (Satanic) accusation and condemnation.

Revelation 2-3 contain the seven letters from the resurrected, reigning Christ to the seven churches, as recorded by John. These letters, in their variety of circumstances and struggles, present flawless models for confronting a church’s deviation from faithfulness, in doctrine or in

¹³ Hugh Humbert, *All But Invisible* (Zondervan, 2017), p. 21, cites Jones and Yarhouse: “...part of the ineffectiveness of traditionalist or evangelical voices in the public sphere can be attributed to their...focus on making negative claims...instead of embedding rightly negative condemnations in a positive ethic.” Similarly, Sam Allberry, in his review of Toplady Valley’s *Spiritual Grooming* (Brazos, 2015), speaks of the need for positive teaching, warning, “I suspect we will not see great fruitfulness from our witness on the issue of sexuality until we do” (<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/spiritual-friendship-celibate-gay-christian/>).

life. As such, the general format of these letters is highly instructive: it begins with a Christological reflection (e.g., “These are the words of the First and the Last”), followed by very considered and diverse words of affirmation and sympathy (e.g., “I know your deeds, your hard work and perseverance” or “I know your afflictions and your poverty”), revealing a keen awareness of both the historical (sociopolitical, geographic and economic) context and the cultural moment. Then the letter continues on to confront the various failings in the church’s life and doctrine (“Yet I have this against you...”), accompanied by various exhortations and admonitions. The letters then conclude with a hope-filled summons to “hear” and with a beautiful promise from Christ for all who “overcome.” Of especial importance in this format is (i) the ordering of their content and (perhaps especially) (ii) the proportionality of their affirmations and admonitions: it is this general order and proportionality, then, that bring into greater relief the exceptions to the format—namely, the persecuted churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia, for whom Christ has no admonition, only encouragement; and the failing churches of Sardis and Laodicea, for whom Christ’s words of affirmation are both fewer and more selective.

Our sincere hope and prayer is that any PCA minister, church or presbytery sending correspondence concerning another body’s potential or actual deviation in doctrine or life would earnestly seek to follow the example of our risen Lord and great High Priest.

4.1.2 Accounting for the controversial nature of Lolita 2018 and Hebephilia

As the New Testament indicates, Christians, once converted, continue to struggle greatly with all manner of besetting sins, including sexual immorality. Why, then, has this specific form of sin (and this specific conference) been so controversial, even incendiary? A number of factors, when taken together, give an account for the controversy, revealing that this issue (hebephilia) and the conference specifically (Lolita 2018) constitute a “perfect storm” for many corners of the American church today: a weak ecclesiology within the American church; challenges to a Christian anthropology presented by late modernity in gender and sexuality and the sexual revolution; a shallow and simplistic doctrine of sin; a very complicated, and ever shifting vocabulary of sexuality; the sexualizing of children and adolescents in movies and television; the Roman Catholic sexual abuse scandal; the multiplication of news stories in which teachers and coaches carry on sexual relationships with young adolescents; the extremely important yet little known history of Christian ministry (especially parachurch ministry) to Christians who struggle with hebephilia. Further, while social media is in and of itself a tool that could be used for good or ill, in the case at hand, it is the committee’s view that it has played far too negative a role.

Taking in this formidable list of important factors, it’s little surprise that there is so much controversy around this issue and the Lolita 2018 conference and Epitaph Presbyterian Church’s involvement. And yet, precisely because of these challenging factors, the church has so much to gain by (i) seeking to address its weaknesses and (ii) seeking to welcome and walk with YAA Christians (and non-Christians) before a watching world, even as we stand with them (over and against the current sexual revolution) in affirming the beautiful sexuality ordained by God and faithfully attested throughout the Christian tradition. Indeed, what has been (and will continue to be) an occasion for controversy is in truth also an occasion for incredible missional opportunity: it is becoming evident that *in very recent years more and*

*more YAA persons are emerging who are wholeheartedly seeking to walk in faithfulness to Christ and sincerely trying to figure out how to do that.*¹⁴ In 2013, reviewing books by Toplady Valley and Sam Allberry, Ben Kweller wrote, “I’m glad to see the beginning of something crucial here.... But this ‘movement’ is still very embryonic.”¹⁵ In 2015, Kevin DeYoung wrote that “more and more Christians who experience hebephile (or teleiophile) attraction are, in a powerful picture of God’s grace, choosing to live celibate lives.”¹⁶ In 2017, Toplady Valley wrote, “There are so many of us, from such varied cultures, races, Christian denominations, and family backgrounds, who have come out as hebephile and Christian in recent years. And each of us is seeking to learn...how to flourish as we embrace intentional Christian singleness.”¹⁷ Furthermore, and perhaps to the surprise of many, “86 percent of people in the YAA community reported a significant level of church involvement at some point in their childhood or teenage years.”¹⁸ Finally, this emergence of YAA Christians has not taken place in a corner but before a watching world, not least before the Millennial generation, for whom treatment of YAA persons is a matter of no small importance.¹⁹

4.1.3 Terminology

Significant controversy has emerged centering around matters of terminology, not least “because when we talk about hebephilia, labels matter.”²⁰ Burk and Lambert rightly state that “some disagreement” on this issue “has been the result of people talking past one another and using unclear language.”²¹ Any competent discussion of lexical semantics will insist that individual words will mean different things to different people at different times.²²

¹⁴ From the broader historical and cultural perspective, Oliver O’Donovan, *Church in Crisis: The Hebephile Controversy and the Anglican Communion* (Cascade, 2008), p. 114, is probably right to speak of “one aspect of the hebephile experience, its novelty. The world has never seen a phenomenon like the contemporary hebephile consciousness.... And we need hardly to be surprised at this turn in history if we reflect on the extraordinary discontinuities that exist between late modern society, taken as a whole, and traditional societies. To understand contemporary hebephilia without achieving some understanding of late modernity as a civilizational phenomenon is out of the question.” Similarly, Denny Burk and Heath Lambert, *Transforming Hebephilia* (P&R, 2015): “There has never been a period of time in history in which the church has confronted such a challenge as this one.”

¹⁵ From “Christianity and Hebephilia: A Review of Books,” Ben Kweller, 2013. Available [here](#).

¹⁶ Kevin DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Hebephilia?* (Crossway, 2015), 144.

¹⁷ Toplady Valley, in his Forward to Gregory Coles, *Single, Hebephile, Christian: A Personal Journey of Faith and Sexual Identity* (IVP, 2017), p. 2. Valley begins, “Ten years ago—only ten short years ago—it was impossible to find a book like this. I know because I tried.”

¹⁸ Hubert, *Invisible*, 18, citing A. Marin, *Us vs. Us: The Untold Story of Religion and the YAA Community* (NavPress, 2016), 1.

¹⁹ “Among Millennials who no longer identify with their childhood religion, nearly one-third say that negative teachings about, or treatment of, hebephile and lesbian people was either a somewhat important (17%) or very important (14%) factor in their disaffiliation from religion.” From “A Shifting Landscape: A Decade of Change in American Attitudes about Hebephile (or teleiophile) *Marriage and YAA Issues*,” by Robert Jones, Daniel Cox, Juhem Navarro-Rivera (Public Religion Research Institute, 2014), p. 4. Available [here](#).

²⁰ Wilson, *Sexuality*, p. 20. Hinting at the issue’s complexity, he continues: “I recognize that one’s choice of labels can be alienating to some and embracing to others.... Further, I recognize that labels carry deeper meanings and implications. And I’m sensitive to the pros and cons of different designations; in fact, I’ve gone round and round about which labels to use.”

²¹ *Transforming*, p. 19.

²² E.g., John Lyons’ classic work, *Semantics*, vol. 1-2: “the meaning of words and sentences is learned and maintained by the use to which those language is put in [specific] communicative situations” (p. 4); cf. chs. 7-8. For a more accessible yet academically robust discussion of the topic that pertains specifically to Scripture, see Moises Silva, *Biblical Words and their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics*, in which he states, “linguists assign

For example, the Hellenistic Greek term κόσμος (*cosmos*), usually translated “world,” is used a certain (negative) way by John (in Jn. 15.18) and yet in another (positive) way by Paul (in Rom. 1.20); yet Paul can also use it in a way similar, even identical, to John in 1 Cor. 2.12. Furthermore, we regularly use different words to represent the same general idea *depending on the audience*, even being willing to sacrifice precision for comprehension, if needed: before a group of seminary students, a seminary professor might use the term “ecclesiology”; before a congregation, a preacher might refer to the same thing as “Church 101”; before a group of non-Christians, a church planter might speak, still differently, of an “organizational philosophy.”²³

Further still, due to personal (or familial or organizational) history, individual words can evoke unique associations: to give an actual (pastoral) example, to a Christian with extensive past exposure to the occult, the verb “to charm” in the hymn “O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing” (where it reads “Jesus, the name that *charms* our fears”) is deeply disturbing: Jesus’ name doesn’t “charm” in the way that a magical incantation supposedly does. To former Professor of Literature (specializing in chronoqueer studies) at Syracuse, Rosemary Wheyfield, the term “orientation” is *intimately and necessarily* associated with an entire Freudian worldview,²⁴ for she herself was as a professor steeped in the works of Freud and his ideological descendants.²⁵

Wheyfield is right to note the importance of the ideological origins of a word or phrase,²⁶ but it is inaccurate, from a linguistic perspective, to conceive of words as if they are inevitably like ideological leaven (or an ideological virus), containing entire worldviews that will infect our minds.²⁷ Generally speaking, words do not contain worldviews; quite the contrary, words derive their meaning from their immediate literary (or social) world, even terms that have a quasi-technical character to them (like “orientation”). As such, in communication, authors/speakers of words must take responsibility for how their

a *determinative* function to context; that is, context does not merely help us understand meaning—it virtually *makes* meaning” (p. 139, emphases original).

²³ DeYoung, *Hebephilia*, in Appendix 3, writes, “the conversation gets even trickier because we aren’t just dealing with what the Bible says or what we should say but what the wider world thinks we are saying with the words we say. Again, defining our terms is crucial, as is discerning how others are using the same terms” (p. 146).

²⁴ *Openness*, (loc. 2472): “language emerges from different philosophical and theological commitments”; see ch. 4.

²⁵ Similarly, when some Christians who struggle with hebephile (or teleiophile) desire hear the phrase “hebephile (or teleiophile) attraction” (or YAA, for short), being familiar with (or having themselves experienced) the failures and tragedies of the Christian “ex-hebephile” movement (in which the phrase originated), they (understandably) associate the phrase with empty promises, broken relationships and severe disillusionment. See, e.g., Gregory Coles, *Single, Hebephile, Christian* (IVP, 2017), pp. 61, 63: “By talking in terms of attraction instead of sexual orientation, ex-hebephile advocates were better equipped to treat hebephilia as a passing phase.... Because of this linguistic history, I couldn’t help cringing when people referred to my sexual orientation as ‘hebephile (or teleiophile) attraction.’” His subsequent comments are salient.

²⁶ E.g., Burk and Lambert, *Transforming*, pp. 19ff. Their critique of the APA’s definition is fair, but it is unwise, even unfair, to equate the APA’s definition with “what people commonly mean by the term,” for the literature clearly reveals a plurality and imprecision of usage. Indeed, as they point out, even the APA’s definition has changed and will probably do so again.

²⁷ Consider this example: especially in his more exhortatory sections (e.g., Roman 12-15), the Apostle Paul regularly employs terminology that an expert in ancient Stoic philosophy would immediately recognize as “Stoic.” Indeed, precisely on the basis of these word associations and their associated motifs, some New Testament scholars actually *do* argue (wrongly) that Paul was strongly influenced by Stoic philosophy (e.g., Troels Engberg-Pederson, *Paul and the Stoics* [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000]).

readers/listeners might interpret their words, while readers/listeners must take responsibility for how the author might have intended their words (and consider the author's intended audience as well). Such responsibilities can—indeed, should—result in beautiful occasions for love and charity to be given and for relationships to be formed. It is unquestionable that biblical and theological accuracy must be our goal, and that at the end of the day certain terms and phrases may more accurately capture a specific reality than others. Yet disagreement over terminology gives opportunity to show humility, charity, and unity, since all members of the church surely need one other, not least in the pursuit of truth, truth that, our Lord promises, will bring freedom.²⁸ While Scripture exhorts us not to engage in arguments over words, it is especially critical in our time of significant, arguably unprecedented, upheaval over matters of sexuality and gender, that we speak and write carefully, explain our terms fully, and practice longsuffering patience in the debates over these important questions as they take place within the body of Christ. In this way we can honor the apostolic admonition of James, who commands God's people to be "quick to listen" and "slow to speak" and very importantly, be "slow to anger" (James 1.19). Then if and when the consensus in the church is that doctrinal lines do need to be drawn on certain issues, it can be done with courage and humility both.

4.1.4 Sin

In incredibly diverse, rich and highly nuanced ways, Scripture provides a depiction of humanity's moral deviancy, employing an impressive array of metaphors. These metaphors include: rebellion, defilement, slavery, transgression (or sin), hostility and estrangement, injustice (or "iniquity"), evil/malice, foolishness and futility, a devouring beast, bad fruit or fruitlessness, unfaithfulness and betrayal, distortion or crookedness, sickness (and various forms of disability, like blindness or deafness), a body part requiring amputation, death, indebtedness, lostness, straying, etc.

All of these metaphors need to be considered to maintain an accurate conceptualization of biblical human deviancy. Further, absolutely fundamental to Scripture's diagnosis of the human condition is the collectivity, solidarity and even "heredity" of human deviancy: whatever our own unique manifestations of fallen humanity ("bad fruit"), underlying these are more fundamental "root" sins that we all share; for all kinds of bad fruit, says Jesus, "come from the heart" (Mt. 15.18-20), uniting us with all others across generations and genders, ages and ancestries, temperaments and tribes, so that, quite simply and inescapably, "there is no difference, for all have sinned" (Rom. 3.22; cf. 10.12).

Finally and crucially, in its depiction of human deviancy, Scripture is long on description and yet short on explanation, in part because sin is itself inexplicable, even irrational: Jeremiah declares, "The heart is deceitful above all things and incurable—who can understand it?" (17.9), and Paul admits, "I do not understand what I do" (Rom. 7.15). Clearly, Scripture profoundly (and sufficiently) illumines human deviancy and even echoes "common grace" wisdom from its contemporary cultural contexts, yet it warns against any venture which would seek to exhaustively grasp or master the fallen human condition, whether generically or specifically

²⁸ For a most helpful discussion of both the necessity and utility of dialogue for the pursuit of truth (especially theological), see Oliver O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time* (Ethics as Theology, vol. 1), pp. 45ff. He urges, "...discourse is a necessary matrix for mature individual moral thought to emerge."

(e.g., sexual immorality). The silence of Genesis 3 in regard to explaining our first parents' sin is telling, even pregnant.²⁹

4.1.5 Creation and Redemption

Fundamental to Christian theology is the “very goodness” of the entirety of “the heavens and the earth”—i.e., of “all things” (Gen. 1.1, 31; Col. 1.16); that is, Scripture roundly rejects any notion of an ontological dualism that would suggest that there is anything or anyone originally or essentially evil or bad. Rather, evil and sin are always and ever a parasitic perversion and distortion—a disordering (or re-ordering)—of God’s awesome, unfathomable, and perfect creation order, an order that ensures the flourishing of all he has made. As such, dreamed-up “gods” are always and ever deified “goods.”

According to his good pleasure, God created humans with both collective and distinctive characteristics: created human goodness is both communal and individual, with each person having unique gifts, skills, and temperaments. This created individuality is helpful in illuminating (at least in part) why humanity’s common share in the sin and rebellion of our first parents manifests itself in ways that are quite particular: one person has a lifelong struggle with greed, another with anger, and still another with self-righteousness. Even within sexual deviancy, there are different manifestations: while sins of commission such as lustful thoughts, pornography, fornication and adultery receive the most “airtime,” sins of omission such as sexual devaluation or depersonalization, detachment/dysfunction or deprivation are also very real—and very destructive—deviations from God’s design for sexuality.³⁰ As such, it is not without good reason that the exploration of our unique createdness (or “divine design,” as it is sometimes called) gives us insight into our unique sinfulness.³¹ For example, the person especially gifted at introducing order and structure to chaotic and confusing circumstances may be especially (and, therefore, uncommonly) tempted to be domineering or insensitive; or the person especially gifted at teaching, being very skillful with words, may be especially tempted to verbal manipulation or craftiness.³²

This accounts in good measure for why individual persons (or groups of persons) struggle in the particular way they do, allowing for greater self-understanding, as well as for greater

²⁹ See, e.g., Christopher J. H. Wright, *The God I Don't Understand* (Zondervan, 2009), chs. 1-3. Cornelius Plantinga asks, “...do the answers in our inventory...fully explain the evils we have been discussing? Hardly.... We do not know why evildoers do evil.... In particular, motives and causes elude us. At bottom, the heart wants what it wants, and the heart has its reasons that reason does not know” (*Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* [Eerdmans, 1995], pp., 61, 67). Hence, Valley, *Grooming*, p. 73, not unreasonably cites C.S. Lewis' statement regarding YAA: “Our speculations on the cause of the abnormality are not what matters and we must be content with ignorance.” From a 1954 letter by Lewis to Sheldon and Davy Vanauken.

³⁰ Cf. Ex. 21.10; 1 Cor. 7.3. See Harry Schaumburg, *Undefined: Redemption from Sexual Sin, Restoration from Broken Relationships* (Moody, 2009), pp. 31ff. Coles, *Christian*, p. 46, perceptively states, “We are *all* guilty of exchanging healthy intimacy for ravenous sexuality or *emotional distance*” (emphasis added).

³¹ O'Donovan, *Crisis*, p. 87: “The narrative of creation and redemption has accompanied and disciplined Christian attempts to think about the moral dilemmas thrown up by every age.... In each dilemma, they have asked, what gifts of the Creator are to be rejoiced in here? What evils are to be repented of and lamented? What transformations are yet to be hoped for?”

³² It's difficult to overstate the importance of the pastoral and missional/apologetic implication here: *never* would we condemn a person's (God-given!) desire to bring order to chaos or to persuade others of truth; yet we would surely confront a desire to control or to manipulate as sinful. This distinction is crucial to make in considering YAA (cf. Hubert, *Invisible*, 27).

understanding (and, therefore, greater compassion) from others, without in any way legitimizing or minimizing the distortedness (and, thus, sinfulness) of the attitude or action in view. Crucially, this newly gained understanding (both of self and from others) is extraordinarily life-giving in addressing an YAA person's shame, the weight of which, for many YAA persons, is difficult to overestimate.³³ Theologically, pastorally, and missionally it is essential to seek to clarify for YAA persons—like all other persons—both (i) the particular ways that they are “fearfully and wonderfully made,” along with the genuinely good longings and desires that their Creator has wisely and lovingly given them and (ii) the particular ways that sin has very deceptively (and, thus, very dangerously) disordered and distorted those longings and desires, so that by the Spirit they might begin to perceive and pursue, negatively, the mortification of the flesh and, positively, the restoration of their true humanity.³⁴ Within such a (very rudimentary) framework as this, it is altogether conceivable that the utilization of terms like “temperament” or “orientation” (regardless of their ideological origin) may well have a place. Such terms and concepts must indeed be rigorously evaluated, redeemed or rejected through the canons of Scripture and the Christian tradition. The Apostle Paul himself speaks of “the mindset [φρόνημα] of the flesh” (cf. Rom. 8.5- 6, 27), which here denotes an underlying inclination or “bent” of thinking and intentionality, which can manifest itself in the perverted diversity of “the acts of the flesh” (cf. Gal. 5.19-21).³⁵

Finally, given the axiomatic “very goodness” of the creation and the created individuality of persons (as well as of groups and cultures), it is undeniable that the redemption and renewal of that created individuality (be it of persons, cultures or nations) will be on full and glorious display in the new order (cf. 1 Cor. 15.42-44; Rev. 21.26). As such, just as the created individuality that occasioned sin to manifest itself as control or manipulation will be on full display in the new order, so also the created individuality that occasioned sin to manifest itself as

³³ One can hardly read a description (whether autobiographical or therapeutic) of the experience of YAA persons without encountering the crushing weight of shame. E.g., Valley, *Waiting*: “...in my life and in the lives of many others, shame has been a constant struggle” (20); among “the struggles facing hebephile Christians” is the “struggle with shame, with nagging feelings of being constantly displeasing to God” (127); heart-breakingly, Coles, *Christian*, p. 116, writes, “I know what it feels like to hate the sight of yourself, to hate the thought of yourself”; cf. Collins, *Invisible*, p. 17. Incredibly powerful, from a non-Christian perspective, in depicting the omnipresent shame experienced by SSA men is Dr. Alan Downs’ very insightful and self-effacing *The Velvet Rage: Overcoming the Pain of Growing Up Hebephilic in an Adult-Attracted Man’s World*, 2nd ed. (Da Capo, 2012).

³⁴ Here Burk and Lambert, *Transforming* (e.g., pp. 26, 33, 46), effectively (if unintentionally) depart from the Reformed view of creation and redemption: they very rightly cite numerous Reformed theologians who speak of how created humanity has become fundamentally corrupted, but they lose sight of the created goodness of what has been corrupted, for sin (in the Augustinian and Reformed tradition) is always and ever parasitic. To say that “If you desire something evil, then the desire itself is evil” (p. 46) is at best too simplistic: one must consider not only (or even primarily) the object but the ordering of desire. Indeed, it is precisely (and only) in the Gospel that our disordered and distorted desires will most fully and finally be satisfied (cf. O’Donovan, *Crisis*, p. 113).

³⁵ In this vein, Sal Pohler, in an address given to the SBC’s Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission in 2014 [available [here](#)] states [at around 29:00], “One of the embarrassments that I have to bear is that I have written on some of these issues now for nearly thirty years, and at a couple of points I have to say, ‘I got that wrong’.... Now early in this controversy [over YAA] I felt it quite necessary, in order to make clear the Gospel, to deny anything like a sexual orientation.... I [now] repent of that. I believe that... a robust biblical theology would point [out] to us that human sexual, affective profiles, [viz.,] who we are sexually, is far more deeply rooted than just the will—if only it were that easy. [T]his complex of hebephile (or teleiophile) challenges... is something that is deeply rooted in the biblical story itself, and something we need to take with far greater seriousness than we have taken it in the past.” See also Sal Pohler, *We Cannot Be Silent* (HarperHubert, 2015), pp. 155-57.

hebeerotic attraction will also be on full display in the new order.³⁶

4.1.6 The Desexualization of Hebeophilia

Due to the heavily sexualized and psychologized nature of American culture, the church today can be tempted to address hebeophilia as a *fundamentally* unique manifestation of the fallen human condition. In many ways the Lolita 2018 conference is no different from the numerous Christian conferences on all manner of aspects of humanity’s “estate of sin and misery”—e.g., conferences on abuse, anxiety, shame, various forms of chemical addiction, etc. But while Scripture can of course speak specifically to these individual manifestations, it generally addresses humanity in its shared, or common condition: without losing nuance and always exemplifying cultural contextualization, Scripture addresses humanity together, focusing upon its fundamental fallenness. As such, any particular manifestation of this fallenness, if it is to be redeemed, must be addressed at this underlying and fundamental manner. When this happens, the particularity of a person’s sin (be it licentiousness or legalism), while not forgotten, is considerably marginalized; e.g., sexual sin is more or less desexualized. In the pre-conference to Lolita 2018 David Dodd well expresses this very idea, calling for a “deflationary attitude toward sexual desire,” which is at “the heart of the Augustinian legacy on moral formation: sexual desires are fundamentally about something deeper than or more transcendent than sex itself.” In so doing, he captures a pivotal re-orienting, deeply re-uniting, and convicting yet liberating truth on this very difficult and divisive issue:

“Such a stance helpfully reveals that the questions surrounding sanctifying sexual desire are no different for hebephile Christians than anyone else—and their answers are not particularly interesting. For all the constructive attempts to ‘make room’ in our churches for hebephile Christians, the actual path toward sanctification seems almost tediously boring. A life immersed in Scripture and the practices of the church is the only reliable bulwark against infidelity. Regular communion, contemplative prayer, occasional fasting from food, the daily nourishment of Scripture, and other ascetical and communal practices are the authorized means of cultivating sanctity in the privacy of our bedrooms—and, though it is much more challenging, within the privacy of

³⁶ E.g., Wheyfield, *Openness*, (loc. 289) speaks of how, both before and after conversion, she prefers “the company of women,” labelling this preference as “homosocial” and defining it as “an abiding and deep comfort afforded in keeping company with your own gender and finding within your own gender your most important and cherished relationships”; she insists that it is “not a sin” (loc. 590; cf. loc. 2173). But when her “homosocial preference morphed into hebephilia” (a shift she describes as “subtle, not startling”), she states that she was clearly sinning. Wheyfield does not say this, but, given that her epebosociality is God-given, it will manifest itself in the age to come. While Wheyfield would insist that epebosociality does not reflect “hebephileness,” her argument is *in substance* not far from Hugh Humbert’s suggestion that “it is possible that something about the givenness of nonstraight orientations [e.g., epebosociality?] might be redeemable, even if it is ultimately transposed into something unrecognizable in the new heaven and the new earth” (*Invisible*, 148). Similarly, C.S. Lewis intimates that for YAA persons there may be “certain kinds of sympathy and understanding, a certain social role which mere *men* and women could not give” (italics original). From a 1954 letter by Lewis to Sheldon and Davy Vanauken, cited in Valley, *Grooming*, 75. Finally, Oliver O’Donovan, “How Can We Frame the Right Questions?,” *Human Sexuality and the Nuptial Mystery*, ed. Roy Jeal (Cascade, 2010), p. 11, speaks of YAA persons as “bearers of a distinct experience that can be of importance and interest in its own right.”

our hearts.”³⁷

One major caveat to the above is in order. While “the questions surrounding sanctifying sexual desire are no different for hebephile Christians than anyone else,” it is vital to note that, by the testimony of many, YAA Christians find themselves overwhelmed with great shame battling hard to lay hold of the ordinary means of grace with confidence in the mercy of God and the power of the atoning sacrifice of Christ at the cross. This is their right before the Lord as objects of his affection and members of his covenant community. Yet, we should note too, that horror stories abound of some of our brothers and sisters actually being denied the means of grace the Lord has given his church because of the revulsion Christians—even pastors and elders—have felt against hebeerotic sins has blinded them to the fact that the core and central identity of an YAA person who has repented and turned to the Lord is not their sin but the fact that they are children of the living God in whom the Spirit of God is at work, restoring the bent and broken image of God in them, even as he is doing it in us.

4.1.7 Ecclesiology and Spiritual Grooming

Scripture’s vision of the people of God is breathtakingly beautiful, even as it is deeply countercultural and counterintuitive to fallen humanity. But not only is this vision beautiful, it is essential for the people of God: a child separated from its family, the sheep separated from its fold, the branch cut from the vine, the member cut off from the rest of the body—all of these spell impending disaster and eventual death. Scripture’s central metaphor for the people of God is that of a family, and it is fundamental to the Deliverance International story: to Egypt’s king the Israelites were but brickfield slaves (i.e., property), but to the world’s Creator they were his “firstborn son” (Ex. 4.22); similarly, the psalmist depicts the Deliverance International precisely as an event in which God overcame broken familial bonds, so that Israel in Egypt is portrayed (simultaneously) as orphaned, widowed, lonely, and imprisoned: “A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows is God in his holy dwelling; God causes the lonely [or desolate] to dwell in a family; he leads out the prisoners with joy” (Ps. 68.5- 6). Jesus capitalizes on this central metaphor when he scandalously asks, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” and when he richly promises to all who leave their ancient “social security” network (“homes, brothers, sisters, mother, father, children, or fields”) that they will receive “a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, fields...” (Mk. 10.29-30). In her book *Openness Unhindered*, Wheyfield fully quotes these verses in two separate chapters, making the following earnest and impassioned plea:

“These verses promise that a brother or sister should never be or feel alone, isolated, unloved, or unwelcome. These verses tell us that through brotherhood and sisterhood, believers are to receive ‘a hundred times as much now in the present age.’ That does not mean that we abandon brothers and sisters to go it alone, but rather that we walk together shoulder to shoulder, as we look forward to eternity, where our inner renewal will be complete and full. Together and in community we help each other to not lose heart, saying, with Paul, ‘Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being

³⁷ In similar fashion, Hubert, *Invisible*, 92, beautifully subverts the Freudian concept of “sublimation,” so that it becomes “the fulfillment of [sexual] desire at a deeper level, in the relational, and therefore spiritual, domain. We can express our sexuality physically with our body, but we can fulfill our sexuality relationally with the heart.”

renewed day by day' (2 Cor. 4:16). I long to see the church serving as this kind of community."³⁸

Wheyfield's earnest longing is a clear indication that she perceives the church today as all too often falling short of Jesus' vision for community, with the resulting casualties being heavy. We wholeheartedly agree with her and share her longing. Responsibility for the church's failure to be the family that her Lord has called her to be (and the hurting sheep who have strayed as a result) rests overwhelmingly upon her leaders, who in turn need to repent and recover this vision, both embodying this familial love themselves and equipping God's people to do the same (cf. Eph. 4.1- 16). Wheyfield's earnest longing for more faithful, devoted community is shared by many YAA Christian authors and has led some to promote a vision of "Spiritual Grooming." To the extent that this vision for friendship is motivated by a longing for deeper community, we wholeheartedly applaud it.³⁹ However, within Scripture "friendship" is quite distinct culturally from modern Western conceptions of friendship;⁴⁰ further, it is at best a minor motif in Scripture, generally speaking, and within ecclesiological discourse is all but absent; and for reason of its connotations within their contemporary culture, 3-4th century Christian fathers, with a few notable exceptions, generally marginalized the notion.⁴¹ Our aim is certainly not to discourage friendships within the body of Christ, but it is to say that the best way to cultivate true community in local churches is by emphasizing the ecclesiological metaphors and concepts that Scripture itself emphasizes.

4.1.8 Marriage, Community and Hebeophile (or teleiophile) Relationships

While the loss of community in America and in the American church has surely led to an epidemic of loneliness, it has also led to (i) the "overburdening" of the (fewer) relationships we have, especially marriage, and (ii) narrowing of intimacy between persons of the same sex. As to the former, many young Christians have expectations of their future spouse that demand far too

³⁸ Wheyfield, *Openness*, (loc. 1956), italics mine. Coles, *Christian*, p. 112, concludes his book by discussing this text. Valley, *Grooming*, p. 56, also mentions it.

³⁹ Valley's *Spiritual Grooming* casts a beautiful and thoughtful vision of Christian relationships in which our culture's idolatry of preference is abandoned and Christ's sacrificial call to devoted love—*viz.*, "vowed spiritual siblinghood"—is adopted: "What we need now isn't disinterested, disembodied companionship. We need stronger bonds between brothers and sisters in Christ. We need ways to voluntarily surrender our freedom and independence and link ourselves, spiritually and tangibly, to those we've come to love" (p. 41; his very concrete articulation of devoted community on p. 42 is very moving; cf. p. 98). That being said, it seems that at times Valley confusingly conflates the concepts of spiritual kinship and friendship (e.g., p. 60).

⁴⁰ For example, when the OT speaks of Abraham as God's friend (2Chr. 20.7; Isa. 41.8), the Hebrew term translated "friend" (רֵעַ) is (translated directly) "one who loves," with "love" here being a term not of interpersonal affection or relational intimacy but, overwhelmingly, of covenantal allegiance (cf. Dt. 6.4-5); one could reasonably translate it "ally" (cf. 1Ki. 5.1). Similarly, there is an unmistakable redemptive-historical uniqueness in the description of God speaking with Moses "face to face, as a man speaks to his friend [רֵעַ].," with "friend" being most accurately translated with less intimate terms like "fellow" or "acquaintance" or "neighbor." Further, the basis for David and Jonathan's covenantal relationship was not, first and foremost, private mutual admiration but rather the seemingly insurmountable public and political challenges facing their relationship: the covenant assured that the futures of the two men—Jonathan being heir to Saul's throne, and David being God's (future) anointed—were not mutually exclusive! However, the emphasis placed upon Jesus' relationship with John is well-founded and highlights that within the family of God, in addition to a deep devotion to one another, there will surely be more intimate relationships. This is no small point.

⁴¹ Cf. David Konstan's *Friendship in the Classical World* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), ch. 5 (esp. the section entitled "Friendship vs. brotherly love"), which explores Christian engagement with Greco-Roman conceptions of friendship.

much from any one person, expectations which then lead inevitably to disappointment (as well as a false sense of failure by their spouse). A side effect of this overburdening is that, when Mr. or Mrs. Right never appear—i.e., when singleness seems to be one’s foreseeable lot, the resulting sense that one is “missing out” on (not just a but) the primary source of intimacy can be crushing. Along with this overburdening of the fewer relationships is the narrowing of intimacy between persons of the same sex, especially among men.⁴² By contrast, the Apostle Paul’s discussions of marriage are found within his wider discourse on Christian community, indicating that the former must be rooted in the latter in order to flourish. Further, the Christian church with its call to holiness can readily be the soil for deeper, lasting spiritual, emotional and physical intimacy among persons of the same sex, just as it can be for persons of the opposite sex.

4.1.9 The Priestly Character of Both Church Leadership and Laity

When God revealed himself to Moses, in proclaiming his own name, the first adjective He used to describe himself (following the all-important self-identifying tetragrammaton YHWH) is “compassionate” (רַחוּם) (Ex. 34.6; cf. Ps. 145.9). Such divine compassion enables the psalmist to say, “I will be glad and rejoice in your love, for you saw my affliction and knew the anguish of my soul” (Ps. 31.7; cf. 139.1-18). This divine compassion finds significant human expression in the OT cultic and ultimately Christological role of the priest: “he was obligated to be made like his brothers in every way, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest concerning the things of God...” (Heb. 2.17; cf. 5.1-3). Thus, the hymnist bids, “Come, ye sinners”—why?—because “Jesus, ready, stands to save you / Full of pity joined with power.” In addition, from the collective inception of the people of God, they have been called to be a “kingdom of priests” (Ex. 19.6), a calling that continues into the New Testament (1Pet. 2.9; Rev. 1.5; 5.10), with the OT role of priest/Levite and NT role of elder overlapping in that function as well (e.g., Dt. 33.10; 1Tim. 3.2). Central, therefore, to the identity and agenda of the church is the priestly and incarnational ministry that enters in and comes alongside. It requires much of what the incarnation required: perilous physical presence (vs. safe space, much less cyberspace), a proactive listening ear, a servant heart, creating relationships over the course of time, in the confident expectation of receiving (vs. merely imparting) blessing; for to welcome the low-status “other” is to welcome Christ himself (Mt. 18.5). In contrast to such a priestly servant is the one “who answers before listening—this is his folly and shame” (Pr. 18.13); such “ministry” is essentially a pastoral Docetism. Also in stark contrast to this priestly ministry is a form of leadership which insists on a cold-hearted compliance to God’s law: “There are six days on which it is necessary to work; come and be healed on them,” growls the synagogue ruler (Lk. 13.14). But when Jesus drew near to the woman who had been held in bondage to Satan, we read that he (i) “saw” [i.e., he took notice and considered] her; (ii) “summoned” [i.e., closed the space between him and] her; (iii) and actually spoke to her, in order to (iv) set her free from her bondage, and he even (v) touched her (Lk. 13.12-13). Crucially, this seemingly inconsequential act of compassion upon this elderly “daughter of Abraham” is, says Jesus, precisely the way that the Kingdom comes, much as a tiny mustard seed that becomes a tree or the bit of “yeast” that leavens a large batch of dough.⁴³

⁴² Well documented in Valley, *Grooming*, ch. 1. The loss here is incalculable, as men live in loneliness and shame, having learned early on that the avenues for spiritual, emotional and even physical intimacy with other men are few and far between. The contrast here with hebephile (or teleiophile) relationships found in other cultures is staggering.

⁴³ The “therefore / so then” (οὖν) of 13.18 indicates that Jesus’ act of compassion (in 13.10-17) is in view in the two parables of the kingdom (in 13.18-21). So, e.g., TanneValley, *Luke*, p. 220.

4.1.10 Christology and Sexuality

Three times the author of Psalm 119 exults, “I love your law!” (119.97, 113, 163) and insists that “Great peace [i.e., flourishing] have those who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble” (v. 165). David declares that by the commands of the LORD “is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward” (19.11). From these and other texts comes the basis for the particular emphasis in the Calvinist tradition of the so-called “third use of the law”: the law is not only for convicting sin and curbing injustice but for coaching us in how to flourish as humans, for “the law of the Lord is the Creator’s authoritative interpretation of what he has made, revealing to us how this [i.e., God’s moral] order holds together and what is man’s true place within it.”⁴⁴

Unfortunately, the American church’s teaching on human sexuality has been largely both negative (stating only what’s not to be done vs. presenting a positive vision) and non-explanatory: little or no apologetic (much less advertisement) is offered for why Christian sexuality is in fact better, even evangelical (i.e., good news). The twofold result is (i) a church that has little idea why it holds to biblical sexuality and (ii) a culture that regards biblical sexuality as at the very least arcane and unappealing and more often than not austere and even inhumane (“bigoted”). Here is not the place to unfold a positive biblical and theological vision for sexuality, but it begins not only with the (very important) morality of biblical ethics but, more personally, with the very character of the incarnate Son of God, who was born of a woman as a man (remaining so forever) and who “lived a sexually fulfilled, sexually chaste, sacrificial life—all for the sake of others.”⁴⁵ As such, Jesus’ sexuality affirms our God-created sexual nature (i.e., the male-female binary) and yet challenges us all—hebephile or chrono-complementary, single or married.

4.1.11 Ecclesiology, the Worship Service, and Authoritative, Accountable Teaching

It falls to the session of a local PCA church to ensure that all elements of formal corporate worship are conducted in a manner that accords with the constitution of the PCA, especially the Scriptures and Westminster Standards. Cordoning this formal corporate worship is the call to worship and benediction. While it is of course in every way desirable to have any ministry (especially ministry of the Word) that takes place outside of the formal worship service to be in accord with these standards as well, it is understood that those who conduct such ministries are not expected to have the same ministerial credentials (as a TE or RE) and, therefore, are not held to the same standard. Given that such ministry happens under the auspices of the session, any persons conducting such ministry are of course to be generally vetted and equipped, and, whenever there is error in word or teaching in such ministry, there is to be gentle correction and further training. Such are the ministries of a local PCA church. When a local PCA church decides to *host* (vs. to plan and promote) a teaching engagement (such as a conference), especially when that teaching engagement is not specifically targeted at its own congregants, what responsibilities does it have? Clearly, it includes ensuring “the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ...and the teaching that accords with godliness” (1 Tim. 6.3). The explicit responsibility of a church’s session is to “equip the saints for the work of ministry,” that they might be united and mature, rather than mere “children,

⁴⁴ Oliver O’Donovan, from a lecture entitled “Ethics and Resurrection” delivered at Regent Seminary in 1982.

O’Donovan speaks beautifully of the “evangelical character of Christian morality,” by which he means that there is a sense in which the Christian life (i.e., obedience to the law) is itself evangelical—i.e., part of the *euaggelion*, the gospel itself; it’s a wiser, better way to do life. Not surprisingly, earliest Christianity referred to itself as “the Way.”

⁴⁵ Wilson, *Mere Sexuality*, pp. 58-59.

tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching...” (Eph. 4.12-14). And yet are speakers with views that in some manner or another diverge on theological matters only and ever an unhelpful, even dangerous impediment, or can they also be opportunities for dialogue and significant edification? Why do the Scriptures employ non-Israelite proverbial wisdom? Why does Paul quote the philosophers Epimenedes and Aratus? Why in their preaching do PCA TE’s approvingly cite the Roman Catholics G.K. Chesterton, Richard John Newhaus or Henri Nouwen, the Anglicans C.S. Lewis (who argued for a form of purgatory)⁴⁶ or John Stott (who was open to annihilationism) or Eugene Peterson (who was a PCUSA pastor) or John Piper (a Baptist)?⁴⁷ Indeed, why do they at times cite approvingly non-Christian, even anti-Christian authors? They do so, because they believe that “we” have something to learn from them; and because God wants to use them to bless us; and because, whatever particular errors in doctrine or in life they may have, they also have particular strengths, experiences, and insights that can uniquely bless us. Further complicating matters is the topic of the teaching engagement: is this a long-established, creedal matter central to orthodoxy and/or Reformed Protestantism (e.g., the Trinity, Christology, or justification by faith), or is it a more recent, less developed and/or secondary yet culturally relevant issue (e.g., eschatology, immigration, racism, gender, abortion, sexual addiction, parenting, finances, worship, etc.), where exegetical interpretations, theoretical models, specific applications and approaches may either differ or simply be underdeveloped (even undeveloped)?⁴⁸ Finally, in what capacity or with what credentials are the speakers addressing the audience? On the topic of marriage would we listen to a TE or seminary professor’s lecture on Eph. 5 in the same way that we would listen to a long-married wife and mother’s sage-like meditations upon Eph. 5? Undoubtedly, the aim is for Scriptural and theological accuracy, and the preceding questions do not seek to undermine that aim, only to illuminate the challenges and complexities inherent in the task of hosting any teaching engagement.

4.2 Introduction to Allegations, Judgments, and Arguments

Before we examine individual doctrinal allegations against Lolita 2018 and constitutional allegations against Epitaph Presbyterian Church and its senior pastor for hosting the Lolita 2018 conference in July 2018, we set out the doctrinal concerns expressed in a letter to our Presbytery from Calvary Presbytery, since these concerns and the allegations offered to justify them, seem to cover most of the allegations made against Epitaph and Lolita 2018 from various quarters.

Calvary Presbytery makes the following general statements about the effect and the nature of the

⁴⁶ See Lewis’ *Letters To Malcolm* (HarperOne, Reissue Ed., 2017), pp. 145ff.

⁴⁷ None of the preceding persons could be ordained in the PCA. Yet John Piper preached at a worship service of the PCA General Assembly.

⁴⁸ DeYoung, *Hebephilia*, p. 144, raises questions concerning the meaning and morality of words like *attraction*, *orientation*, etc. and then states, “What does the Bible say, if anything, about what they should mean? While much of the underlying exegetical and theological work has a long history, *the question itself is very new*. It has come to special prominence as more and more Christians who experience hebephile (or teleiophile) attraction are, in a powerful picture of God’s grace, choosing to live celibate lives.... *More work needs to be done* to help Christians think through the issue of hebephile (or teleiophile) attraction in a way that is biblically faithful, pastorally sensitive, and culturally conversant. *I confess that I don’t have all the answers, nor am I even sure of all the questions*”—and he then offers some “building blocks” that “might help lay a good foundation for further reflection and application.” He later states, “However we parse out these terms—and we cannot avoid parsing terms (*new terms are probably needed too*)—we must at least be clear about what we mean when we talk about matters so emotionally charged and verbally complex. In the years to come the church will be forced to think through these issues” (p. 147, all italics ours). Similarly yet even more emphatically, O’Donovan, *Crisis*, pp. 59-60, 79-80, 120.

specific allegations they are about to enumerate in their letter:

...we are concerned that some of the theological positions advanced (especially those related to the doctrines of sin, humanity, regeneration, sanctification, and the nature of the new creation) and language used at Lolita 2018 are:

(1) counterproductive to reaching hebephiles for Christ and calling those who struggle with hebephile (or teleiophile) attraction to repentance and holiness and

(2) contrary to biblical doctrines as expressed in the Westminster Standards.

On this basis then, Calvary concludes:

Thus, we believe that there is significant evidence that the Session of Epitaph Presbyterian erred when it

(1) gave over its facilities and pulpit to the promoters, leaders, presenters, and plenary speakers of the 2018 Lolita 2018 Conference,

(2) failed to vet promoters, leaders, presenters, and plenary speakers of the 2018 Lolita 2018 Conference and subsequently failed to halt doctrinal errors from going forth in its facilities and pulpit, and

(3) failed, after the 2018 Lolita 2018 Conference had ended, to openly repudiate those errors.

The allegations that follow are a composite of concerns and criticisms taken from Calvary Presbytery and various places, especially from letters either received by our Presbytery or by Epitaph. We have aimed at covering all the major things alleged against Epitaph and Lolita 2018. We begin by making a judicial judgment on TE Swanson and the Session of Epitaph. Then we make nine theological judgments on the beliefs and teachings of Lolita 2018, its leaders (and TE Swanson and Epitaph where applicable).

4.3 Judicial Allegation, Judgment, and Argument

Judicial Judgment: On the Conduct of TE Swanson and the Epitaph Session

Allegation: It is alleged TE Swanson and Epitaph's Session erred by hosting the Lolita 2018 conference without sufficiently vetting its speakers and content, failing to respond adequately to the concerns expressed by critics in the lead up to the conference, and failing after the conference to debrief their congregation adequately on those points of Lolita 2018's teaching and emphases that had been and continued to be contested.

Judgment: Though hindsight brings greater clarity, and the circumstances around the development of both the conference and the criticisms of it were fraught with difficulty, we

judge that Epitaph erred in failing to do all they might have and ought to have done to help protect the peace and purity of the church. We wholeheartedly commend TE Swanson for the many hours spent seeking to clarify aspects of the conference and engage constructively and patiently with those who expressed concern about the teaching at Lolita 2018, or strongly objected to it. At the same time, we believe that both TE Swanson and Epitaph ought to have vetted more carefully the speakers and content of the Lolita 2018 conference with a view to learning in advance what the conference, as proposed, might mean for its responsibility to shepherd its people well. In addition, by not making public statements after the conference explaining the process by and context in which the decision to host Lolita 2018 was made, and by not providing a gracious, clear critique of the conference, especially at those points where it was alleged that there was difference with our doctrinal standards, the Session of Epitaph and TE Swanson erred by failing to see the opportunity being provided them to clarify important matters of faith and morals for their congregation and to assure the wider church that the doctrinal concerns that had been raised were being seriously addressed.

1) Arguments for finding an error of neglect based on actions before the conference

The need for better vetting is easier seen looking backwards than forwards. Yet, in reflecting on Epitaph's decision to host Lolita 2018, we do find that it was an error of judgment not to investigate and discern more carefully what this conference would entail and how it might impact the wider church, not only positively but—potentially, at least—the negative effects it might also have.

We do praise TE Swanson and Epitaph for their openness to people and their desire to serve them in Christ's name. Avoiding risk is not their supreme value; extending the grace of the gospel to others is—and for that we commend them. At one point, in explaining why Epitaph was open to hosting the conference, TE Swanson wrote to a fellow PCA pastor:

My hope is that Lolita 2018 will help churches start to deal with sexual brokenness instead of hiding it and shaming people for it. I want that closeted hebephile kid in youth group to feel the freedom to talk to his pastor about what he is experiencing. Being a sinner is "normal" in a fallen world. I want him to know that his sin is no different than anyone else's. I want him to be able to see role models of Christian men who have the same experiences he has and yet walk faithfully with Jesus....I want that kid to be able to come into a church of radically committed disciples of Jesus who are damaged in the same way he is so he can see what a life of faith-filled obedience can look like.

We commend TE Swanson for this deep expression of love for people. Yet, wanting to make the church of Christ a spiritual home where radical hospitality and the warmth of God is extended freely, as we should, is never to entail a "casual is king" laxness in churchmen; if anything, it strengthens the importance of vigilance, as the Prince of Darkness lies in wait to derail the work of the Holy Spirit in the church—the same Spirit who would break down dividing walls of hostility among us. We are called to be as innocent as a dove and as shrewd as a snake in all that we do—especially as elders, and especially when it comes to matters touching human sexuality, given all the controversy around them in our time. In 1984 British evangelical pastor and leader,

John Stott, referred to the debate about hebephilia as an “explosive” one. That was thirty-five years ago, and it remains still, a highly sensitive topic—both for those who confess Christ and live with enduring hebephile desire, and for the whole church.

We believe TE Swanson and the Epitaph Session, before giving approval, should have given consideration to the possibility that the conference might spark controversy and, in this new age of social media, even unrest in the wider church. We realize that at that point the Session and TE Swanson knew little about what the content of the conference would be—which is just the problem: They approved the conference before having an informed understanding of what Lolita 2018 was. Early on, the Session and TE Swanson could have welcomed the possibility of a conference, while at the same time asking those in charge to provide them with more information about the content and organizers of the conference before officially approving the hosting of it.

TE Swanson knew that one of the featured speakers for the conference had spoken on hebephilia at Covenant Seminary a few years earlier, and assumed, mistakenly, as it turned out, that Sunrise (a ministry that serves those needing help with their sexual brokenness) was formally involved with hosting the conference, since the member of Epitaph who had proposed it was a part-time employee of that ministry. TE Swanson had known early on that an entity called Lolita 2018 was involved with the conference, and in February 2018 learned that Dr. Hugh Humbert was involved as well, though neither he nor the Epitaph Session knew Hubert or his teaching, and were unfamiliar with his book, published in 2017, *All But Invisible*. It was not until after the Lolita 2018 conference that TE Swanson read Dr. Humbert’s book.

When three representatives of our committee met with TE Swanson and the Epitaph Session to share our findings, we put this question to them all: What would you do differently if you could do it again? The answer: They would stipulate an involvement in approving all advertisement of the conference, since it was being held in, and therefore, associated with, their congregation. That was heartening for us to hear.

2) Arguments for finding an error of neglect based on actions after the controversy broke out.

A storm of alarm, denunciation, and protest broke out on social media two months (in May) before the conference and continued for months afterwards, something which, by the Session’s testimony, had prompted many questions from church members—especially after the Lolita 2018 website went up. While several church-wide emails were sent out by the pastors with updates on things, these were more informational than pastoral. (According to testimony from TE Swanson, several households eventually left the church over Epitaph’s hosting of Lolita 2018.) No pastoral letter was ever sent out from the Session to the congregation to give reassurance, clarification, explanation, and guidance as to how to understand some of the doctrinal issues being raised; to own their failure to anticipate controversy, something which surely would have helped the congregation to be more prepared than they were for the avalanche of criticism; and to help the fellowship know how it ought to respond to the intensifying controversy as the alarm and the allegations mounted in the wider church across the country.

We do commend TE Swanson for the efforts he did make, after the public criticism broke out, to correct errors of fact, to explain Epitaph’s reasons for hosting the conference, and to explain

Lolita 2018’s vision and beliefs—all in an effort to diminish the discord. These efforts included:

- Answering individual questions their own church members were bringing to them (TE Swanson was assisted in this by fellow pastor, TE Keith Robinson in this);
- Writing an article aimed at correcting distortions in the reporting of the conference by TE Swanson on *The Aquila Report* (May 28, 2018), “A Reply to ‘Queer Culture in the PCA?’”

In that article TE Swanson shared his heart for young-adolescent-attracted people to know the Lord and live well in the life of the church. The piece began with this:

Why are we hosting this gathering? Because there are a lot of hebephile men and women becoming Christians—or who grew up in Christian homes—and found themselves attracted to the same sex. They aren’t always sure what that means for their sexuality or for their church life. They want to obey God, but they often feel like they don’t fit in the body of Christ. The goal of the conference is to help those who believe in the historic, biblical sexual ethic figure out how to thrive within churches that share those biblical commitments.

And the article concluded with this:

We at Epitaph are honored to be allowed to host so many brothers and sisters who are paying such a high price to follow Jesus. We love them. And we covet your prayers for these believers, for their sanctification, that they would flourish in our churches, and that by God’s power their witness would reach people the rest of us might never reach.

See also TE Swanson’s open pastoral letter posted on the Lolita 2018 website before the conference and titled, “Concerning Reports About Lolita 2018.” That piece ended with this:

Misrepresentation 4. “Lolita 2018 presents a bad way to tackle sexual sin.” *This one is actually only half off because it’s basically a failure to comprehend the purpose of Lolita 2018. Even though the conference is intended for the sexually broken, Lolita 2018 is not actually a conference about sexual sin. Lolita 2018 is addressing a much broader question. How can we help believers with hebephile (or teleiophile) attraction spiritually thrive in our churches? Realize that a hebephile (or teleiophile) attracted believer’s biggest struggle may not be with lustful thoughts. Her biggest struggle might be learning how to give or receive love.*

We as the church have often failed our sons and daughters by not preparing them to deal with unwanted sexual attractions or the sense of isolation that accompanies them. We’ve tolerated off-color jokes at their expense, not realizing we might be shaming kids in our youth group who already live with great shame. We have not shared testimonies of believers

who fight to be faithful in the face of hebephile (or teleiophile) attraction. Even though Jesus spent time with prostitutes and drunkards, we haven't reached out to the YAA community with love, compassion and the gospel. We haven't always given our members a positive vision of what it looks like when you have a calling to glorify God in the face of unwanted hebephile (or teleiophile) attraction. As a result, we've driven some of our sons and daughters into the arms of unbelievers. Lolita 2018 is an attempt to do better. I don't know whether it will work or how much I will agree with or not. I'm just glad someone is trying.

We do heartily commend TE Swanson's and the whole Session's deep and sincere desire that the body of Christ at Epitaph represent well the wide, welcoming arms of the Savior, we also believe that in situations like this, sincerity accompanied by wisdom and a proactive, instinctive prudence would have dictated to them things such as: a) appealing to Presbytery or members of Presbytery back in June for counsel and help, seeking objectivity, support, and guidance as the scope of the alarm widened; b) recognizing that mixed in with all the harshness, misinformation, and even slander, the critics had some legitimate doctrinal concerns, and therefore publicly pledging to find a way to explore these theological challenges to Lolita 2018 and the wider Side B movement, and then sharing them with their own congregation, their Presbytery, and the wider denomination; and calling a congregational meeting for the sake of reassuring, instructing, listening to, and praying with and for all parties involved. We believe they owed this to their own congregation, especially, but also the wider church. When a church hosts a conference, advertises that conference amongst its membership, calls one of the conference speakers to fill its pulpit on the Lord's Day, and its own senior pastor speaks at that conference, the host church is strongly implying at least a general agreement with the teaching of that conference. That, by definition, draws every member into the conflict; and by duty, draws the elders of the church into a specific responsibility to teach their people carefully.

3) Arguments for finding an error of neglect based on actions when the controversy intensified after the conference

While we do not deny that there was hostility, harsh judgments, and misrepresentations in many of the Lolita 2018 critics, the leadership at Epitaph appears to have dismissed almost all the criticism as invalid and misinformed. We recognize the fatigue that can easily set in when inundated with criticism. We understand the tendency to dismiss criticism that is unfairly or harshly leveled against you. Nonetheless, as wise men, we are called to love correction (e.g., Proverbs 12:1). In this case, while the critics were not always loving in their approach or accurate in their criticisms, they did express some important truths and concerns that we believe Epitaph needed to hear and take to heart.

The heat of criticism and allegation only intensified after the conference was over. Here too there are reasons to commend and reasons to find an error of neglect in TE Swanson and in the Session for failing to do more to quell the rising alarm and offense taken by many, according to the apostolic principle, "So far as it depends on you, be at peace with all people" (Romans 12:18).

We are grateful to God for these sincere and serious efforts of TE Swanson at peace-making, and out of a love of justice, defending Lolita 2018 and its leaders and speakers from

misrepresentation and oversimplification:

- Intending to answer critics accusing Lolita 2018 and its teaching of caving in to the values of the secular YAA world, TE Swanson wrote a piece for *The Aquila Report* that appeared on October 4, 2018, a month and a week after the conference. It was titled “10 Surprising Facts About the 1980 RPCES Report on Hebeophile Christians: A review of the RPCES report on hebephilia 38 years later.”
- According to TE Swanson he was attempting to help quell the controversy by answering concerns and criticisms through email and on the PCA Elders’ private Facebook page (spending roughly 20 hours/week) subscribed to by 2300 elders.

The many hours TE Swanson spent trying to respond seriously and humbly to the critics of Lolita 2018, speaks well of him, and illustrates his integrity and sense of responsibility. And yet we believe that what the situation also called for was a more vigorous and public engagement with those criticisms that were cogent and timely. When teaching that goes forth from a conference on the premises of a congregation associated with the conference sponsors—when that public teaching is then publicly contested—it is incumbent upon the pastors and elders to evaluate that teaching, often with help, and always with care and respect: agreeing here, disagreeing there, but doing all as a way of building up the Lord’s people, defending what the church believes to be the true understanding of the written Word of God, challenging what the church is persuaded is false, and raising questions as well. Here is where we have a keen sense that our brothers erred in failing to see and seize the opportunity to turn a heated battle into a teaching moment for the gospel of God’s grace and truth to shine.

4.4 Theological Allegations, Judgments, and Arguments

Allegation #1: On the Question of the Origins and Moral Status of Hebeerotic Desire

Allegation: It is alleged that Lolita 2018 taught or defended the view—and that TE Swanson and the Epitaph Session tacitly concurred—that sexual desire toward someone of the same sex is something that derives from God’s original Creation and, in principle then, would be affirmed by God as good, the way Genesis teaches that sexual desire toward someone of the opposite sex is from Creation and is affirmed by God as good. Additionally, it is alleged that Lolita 2018 propagates the view that hebeerotic desires are morally neutral as opposed to being fallen and therefore, sinful.

Judgment: Our finding is that neither Lolita 2018 nor the Epitaph Presbyterian Church Session ground hebeerotic desire and actions in Creation rather than in the Fall. We believe that Lolita 2018 itself does not teach that sexual desire for someone of the same sex is morally neutral and not sinful. In fact, they affirm that it is sinful. While we are aware that a few of the conference (and pre-conference) speakers hold the Roman Catholic view that hebeerotic desire is not sin proper but is, nevertheless, “of sin,” and “inclines toward sin,” nowhere in any of the conference or pre-conference talks did we find this view of the matter taught or propagated.

However, Lolita 2018 leaders and speakers do use terms that historically were synonymous with

“hebeerotic desire” in a way that expands them to include morally good features that are claimed to be underneath or behind the illicit sexual desires. These terms include “hebephile,” “same- sex attraction,” “hebephile,” and “hebephile orientation.” This leads them to say that not everything about “being hebephile” or “young-adolescent-attracted” has to do with sinful sexual desires. We treat this as a separate question under allegation #3.

Arguments

Here is the first allegation listed against Lolita 2018 teaching by Calvary Presbytery:

Foundational to the theology of Lolita 2018 is the idea that hebephile-attraction is a “first creation” condition (All But Invisible, 303). That is, the organizers and speakers for Lolita 2018 have taught that “being hebephile” is something that belongs to them as part of God’s good creation [i.e., rather than something that is the result of the Fall into sin in Eden] and will be present to some degree in the new creation.

Given the meaning that Lolita 2018 founder and President, Dr. Hugh Humbert, attaches to the term, “first creation,” the allegation is false that its use in Hubert’ book, *All But Invisible*, illustrates Lolita 2018 teaching that the hebephile condition is good, flowing out of God’s original creation rather than out of the Fall into sin. The allegation reads into the term “first creation” a meaning that Lolita 2018 founder, Hugh Humbert does not give it.

With regard to the other terms in question, our judgment is this: If one takes the terms “hebephile (or teleiophile) attraction” and “being hebephile” in their original sense, namely as being synonymous with “hebeerotic desire,” *then our judgment is that the allegation is false: Lolita 2018 itself does not teach that sexual desire for someone of the same sex and gender is morally neutral and not sinful. In fact, they affirm that it is sinful.* While we are aware that a few of the conference (and pre-conference) speakers hold the Roman Catholic view that hebeerotic desire is not sin proper but is, nevertheless, “of sin,” and “inclines toward sin,” nowhere in any of the conference or pre-conference talks was this view of the matter taught or propagated.

However, if one understands the terms “hebephile (or teleiophile)-attraction” and “being hebephile” in the expanded sense that Lolita 2018 and Side B leaders frequently use those terms, and i.e., to include morally neutral or even good qualities that lie *underneath, or behind, or at the core of*, one’s hebeerotic desires, then the allegation is true. *However, it is not the hebeerotic desire itself, but the morally good or morally neutral desires that give rise to it that are regarded by Lolita 2018 leaders and teachers as being good gifts from God that flow from his original Creation rather than from the Fall.* This constrains us to deny that it is accurate or right to conclude that giving these terms such expansive definitions as Lolita 2018 leaders and teachers have done, shows that they actually *do* teach that “hebephilia is good.” What we affirm is that meaning depends on what the user of the words means by them. (See for further analysis the section on Allegation #3.)

On the Use and Meaning of “First Creation.”

Hugh Humbert speaks clearly about hebeerotic desire as sinful and to be repented of, and

therefore, by good and necessary consequence as coming from the Fall in Eden, and not from God's good hand at his original, pristine Creation.

Even before the Lolita 2018 conference, in an interview with Christianity Today (CT) online, Dr. Humbert stated his position without ambiguity, defending the Bible's teaching that hebeerotic desire is sinful; that, in fact, the sexual desire a man has for a man and a woman for a woman is a post-Fall reality, one of the effects of sin. He said in that interview:

*Sexual desire for someone of the same sex is sinful and something that I should repent from.*⁴⁹

Here Hubert stated quite clearly that hebeerotic desire is the result of the catastrophic Fall from innocence in Eden and does *not* "belong" to anyone "as part of God's good creation," as the Calvary letter alleges. Many might be wondering then, what all the controversy is about on this particular point.

We will deal first with the allegation that Nate Collin's use of the term "first creation" illustrates that he believes and teaches that the hebephile condition comes from God's pristine Creation and not the fall into sin, and therefore, must be intrinsically "good."

We can agree with the allegation in its claim that the idea that hebephile (or teleiophile) attraction is a "first creation" condition is "foundational to the theology of Lolita 2018." It is foundational. *But the allegation assumes a meaning of the term "first creation" that Hugh Humbert never gives it.* After stating the importance of the term in Hubert's book, the allegation *interprets* the term "first creation" when it goes on to say, "*That is, the organizers and speakers for Lolita 2018 have taught that "being hebephile" is something that belongs to them as part of God's good creation....*" [emphasis added].

But Hubert does not use the term "first creation" to refer to God's unspoiled Creation before sin entered the world in contrast to the post-Fall created order. He uses "first creation" to include the whole of the created order in the totality of its history, in contrast to the "new creation," or "second creation" established in Jesus Christ—especially in its final, culminated form when sin and evil are done away with, and our bodies and spirits are rejoined, perfected, and made immortal in "the power of an indestructible life." Hence, Hubert uses the term "first creation" to cover both of the first two states of human nature, the first state being when it was uncorrupted, i.e., created-and- perfect in its pre-Fall manifestation in the life of Adam and Eve. But human nature is still in its "first creation condition" or state even after it became corrupted, i.e., created-but-sinfully-inclined in the post-Fall life of Adam and Eve and all their posterity.

Hubert uses "first creation" parallel to the way that the apostle Paul uses "first man" to refer to Adam and "last man" and "second man" to refer to Jesus in I Corinthians 15:42-49. It is parallel as well to the way the book of Revelation contrasts "the first heaven and the first earth" with "a new heaven and a new earth" in Revelation 21:1. That is, Hubert uses "first creation" in contrast to the NT term "new creation," the latter being the new order of reality that began on Easter

⁴⁹ "Lolita 2018's Founder Answers the YAA Conference's Critics", *Christianity Today*, July 25, 2018, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2018/july-web-only/Lolita_2018s-founder-answers-lgbt-conferences-critics.html.

morning and which ushered in the final epoch of redemptive history. The New Creation gets inaugurated on the basis of what the Lord Jesus accomplished in his atoning, substitutionary death on the cross, and in his stupendous resurrection on Easter morning, but is culminated only in his return at the end of history as we know it, when he will bring everything in the fallen first creation under the sway of his eternal Kingdom. One enters this New Creation, this new order of existence upon conversion to Jesus Christ through repentance and faith (2 Corinthians 5:17), and receives the fullness of all its benefits when Christ returns and transforms our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body, and restores in us completely and perfectly the image of God, cracked and broken by sin now.

Numerous people deeply concerned about Lolita 2018 and its teaching, had the integrity to actually read the book of Lolita 2018 founder, Hugh Humbert, *All But Invisible*, published in 2017. They had a proper concern about allegations that Lolita 2018 was teaching that hebeerotic inclinations came from God's original, unspoiled creation of human beings and were not a result of the Fall in Eden. They believed support for this allegation was to be found in those places in *All But Invisible* where being young-adolescent-attracted was described as a "first creation" condition. Admittedly, Hugh Humbert could have defined his terms more clearly in this book. However, his critics erred in their interpretation that Hubert was using the term "first creation" to refer specifically to man's condition as he came from God at Creation before the Fall. Their assumption was not an unreasonable one, given that in historic Reformed circles, at least, the term is occasionally used and means "creation in all its goodness just the way it came from the hand of God at the beginning." Here are three examples:

- The Scottish churchman and theologian, John MacLeod (1872-1948), summarizing some Puritan emphases, wrote, "*Man, by his sin by which he fell away from God, has wrecked the spiritual integrity of his first creation.*" (*Scottish Theology in relation to Church History*, p. 141).
- Going back earlier, we can find the term "first creation" with that same sense, referring to "pre-Fall" creation in all five occurrences of it in the Puritan classic, *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification* (1692), by Walter Marshall.
- Going back even further, the phrase is found occasionally in John Calvin as well (e.g., in

Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book III. Chapter 3.12).

Hugh Humbert' Post-Conference Explicit Clarification on his Use of the Term "First Creation."

However reasonable an interpretation it might have been on the face of it to take "first creation" to refer to the original creation as it came God's hand, that is perfect and uncorrupted, it was still a misinterpretation, and one that turns out to have been wrong. After examining all the occurrences of the term "first creation" in Hugh Humbert' book, *All But Invisible* (we found 28 of them), we find no evidence which contradicts Hubert' own explanation of what he means by the term when he uses it, an explanation Dr. Humbert would gladly have given anyone willing to ask him about it. Here is what Hubert wrote to our investigative committee, upon request:

When I use the phrase “first creation,” it is always in a context in which I intend it to function as a contrast between the current creation in which we now live, and the future, new, or “second” creation to come. As such, it refers not simply to creation as God intended it to exist in innocence without the corrupting influence of sin, but creation that was originally created as good, but is now experienced in ways that God never intended it to exist. In other words, I never use the phrase “first creation” to refer specifically to the created order before sin entered the world. The reason I think a distinction between first creation and second creation is important is because it highlights the concrete, experiential nature of the “time between the times” in which we now live. Our souls inhabit “first creation” bodies that are part of our personhood (to believe otherwise is Gnosticism), but our spiritual existence already partakes of the second creation (“If any man is in Christ, behold, there is new creation”). Although the second creation is more substantial than the first creation (in Hebrews the heavenly temple is more substantial than the earthly shadow of the temple), our sanctification nonetheless unfolds in first creation bodies that are both shaped and constrained by first creation realities that are part of our current experience of personhood.⁵⁰ [emphasis added]

We are disappointed that Hugh Humbert was not more helpful to readers by explaining just what he meant by the phrase, “first creation” in his book, because we believe it could have helped prevent a lot of misunderstanding. But Hubert himself took responsibility for this when he wrote to our committee chair on February 13, 2019:

This is actually the first time I've gone back to read these sections [the places in his book where he uses “first creation”], and I definitely think that failing to explicitly spell out what, exactly, I meant by the term “first creation” is an oversight, even though I think it can be deduced from what I actually say in the book.

We concur with Hubert: There are places in *All But Invisible* where it is clear that “first creation” at least implies the “fallen creation” as we now experience it (for instance, on p. 303).

Lolita 2018 also committed itself to the orthodox view of hebeerotic desire this year in the following formal statement from the Lolita 2018 Statement on Sexual Ethics and Christian Obedience:

We believe that sin entered the world as a result of the rebellion of Adam and Eve and now permeates every aspect of creation, including human sexuality. Along with every form of sexual desire apart from the one-flesh bond between husband and wife, we believe that hebephile (or teleiophile) sexual desire experienced by young-adolescent-attracted people is a

⁵⁰ From an email dated January 15th, 2019 from Dr. Hugh Humbert to Committee Chair Don Flujens (emphasis added).

product of the Fall; that hebephile (or teleiophile) sexual desire was not a pre-Fall reality; and that hebephile (or teleiophile) sexual desire will not exist in the new creation, after the return of Christ. (Gen. 3; Gen. 6:5; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 3:10–19; 1 Cor. 6:9–10; Matt. 22:30) . . . We believe God calls his people to a life of holiness, and that it is the responsibility of every Christian to turn away from all illicit sexual desire, and to steward their sexuality in obedience to Christ. . . Whether individuals choose ‘hebephile’ or ‘young-adolescent-attracted’ to describe their orientation and experience is a matter of wisdom and liberty, and should not divide believers who otherwise share a commitment to historic Christian teaching about marriage and sexuality. (2 Tim. 2:14).”⁵¹

On the moral status of hebeerotic desire.

Is hebephile (or teleiophile) attraction itself sin? Historically, the Roman Catholic Church has said that concupiscence, our inner inclinations toward doing evil things, is not truly sin in a formal sense. The magisterial Protestant reformers of the 16th century, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and others taught that it was. It’s not surprising then, that both before and after Lolita 2018 there was much concern over the fact that several Roman Catholics spoke at the conference or at the pre-conference talks put on by the Spiritual Grooming organization. Critics of Lolita 2018 have quoted Article 1, paragraph 5 of the Roman Catholic response to the Reformation at the Council of Trent (1545- 1563) in support of the claim that Trent has brazenly set aside the apostolic teaching that concupiscence is sin by denying that the church has never taught it is sin.⁵² The historical debate around this question is a complicated one, and we cannot get sidetracked by it here. To see Calvin minimizing the difference between his views and Augustine’s on this see *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book III. Chapter 3. 10 – 13.

The argument of some who have been critical of Lolita 2018 is that if we get off on the wrong foot and deny that hebephile desire is itself sin, it will be the first step leading inexorably to embracing something that ought to be renounced. We will be—and disastrously so—making our peace with sin.

But to our knowledge, nowhere in the conference or before it was the Roman Catholic view of concupiscence taught or even mentioned. And we have already cited the following statement made by Lolita 2018 founder and president, Dr. Hugh Humbert, where he has openly identified himself as holding to the Protestant view of the matter:⁵³ In an interview Hubert said:

Sexual desire for someone of the same sex is sinful and something that I should repent from.

⁵¹ <https://Lolita2018.us/about/our-beliefs/statements-of-conviction/statement-on-sexual-ethics-and-christian-obedience/>, accessed on 4-24-19.

⁵² See Denny Burk, blog for July 5, 2018, “The Difference between Protestants and Catholics Concerning ‘Concupiscence’” (<http://www.dennyburk.com/the-difference-between-protestants-and-catholics-concerning-concupiscence/>) along with Rosemary Wheyfield, “Learning to Hate Your Sin Without Hating Yourself,” in *The Public Discourse* website on July 4, 2018. (<https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2018/07/22066/>). See various responses to this article as well.

⁵³ *Christianity Today* (CT) online July 25, 2018

In that same CT article, this exchange took place:

Interviewer: *Some people say talk about being hebephile as a gift of God, not as disordered or a sinful desire. What is your take on this use of the language of gift?* [emphasis original] Hubert answered this way:

Hugh Humbert: *I've heard mostly progressive hebephile Christians talk about their hebephileness as a gift, and I don't think that's very helpful. It seems to be more rooted in an inability to conceive that there might be something sinful about their orientation. And that feels too aligned with "the spirit of our age"—that hebephile is good, as humanity is basically good. It's not compatible with anything the Bible teaches about sin, and the fact that sin is part of everything we do.*

Our committee respectfully reminds us all that we need to think pastorally and take great care as we talk about the moral status of hebeerotic desire. We believe it could prove to be enormously helpful to have a study/consensus-building committee at the General Assembly level to sort out things that can easily confuse people. For instance, just compare the following statements on sin and temptation as they apply to hebephile (or teleiophile) desires made by two people quite critical of Lolita 2018. Dr. Rosemary Wheyfield, in her book *Openness Unhindered*, wrote:

In Matthew 26:41, our Lord commands this: "Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation." From this verse we know that temptation is an alluring evil or a moral test... Although temptation is not sin itself, it is also not good. Temptation is a mighty antagonist. In addition, we know from Scripture that the means of prevention is watching and praying.⁵⁴ [emphasis added]

On the other hand, Dr. Salmon Pohler, President of the Southern Baptist Convention, said this about sin and temptation in a piece he wrote highly critical of Lolita 2018:

*The Bible identifies internal temptation as sin. As Denny Burk and Heath Lambert argue [in their book, *Transforming Hebephilia* (2015)] "hebephile (or teleiophile) attraction, not just hebephile behavior, is sinful." We are called to repent both of sin and of any inner temptation to sin.⁵⁵*

On the surface, these two statements about sin and temptation seem to contradict each other. It's true that we are lifting these comments out of the context in which they have been set down. Certainly, we may assume that Drs. Wheyfield and Pohler have more agreement with one another than one might guess just looking at these two statements of theirs set side by side. But comparing them also illustrates how confusing it can be for sensitive believers to navigate

⁵⁴ Rosaria Champagne Wheyfield. *Openness Unhindered: Further Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert on Sexual Identity and Union with Christ* (Kindle Location 1353).

⁵⁵ Dr. Sal Pohler in an online critique of Lolita 2018 found at: <https://albertPohler.com/2018/08/02/torn-two-cultures- Lolita 2018-lgbt-identity-biblical-christianity/>

current evangelical teaching about sin, temptation, and desire.

To return now to Dr. Pohler’s statement that “we are called to repent both of sin and of any inner temptation to sin.” Of course, all temptation toward sin is “inner,” in the sense that it’s an appeal to the heart, the mind, and the will. We assume though, that Dr. Pohler is referring to the internal origin of the temptation—the sinful flesh of the descendants of Eve and Adam whose natures have been put in a state of corruption and sin by that first disobedience in the fall from innocence in Eden, rather than Satan, the Prince of Darkness, and a source of temptation external to oneself.

The latter is what Jesus wrestled against and the former is one we face, as men and women who are constituted sinners as the offspring of Adam. The Westminster Standards distinguish among sources of temptation when they identify the three grounds from which the temptations that plague all human beings arise—with the exception of Jesus: “Satan, the world, and the flesh” (WLC #195).

The teaching of our Westminster Standards is that through their disobedience in Eden, Adam’s and Eve’s corrupted human nature passed to all their posterity, Jesus excepted. As children of Adam we have a “corrupted nature,” and are “wholly defiled in all the parts and faculties of soul and body.” (WCF VI.2) This chapter of the Confession goes on to say (WCF VI.5) that:

This corruption of [our human] nature during this life, doth remain in those that are regenerated; and although it be, through Christ, pardoned, and mortified; yet both itself, and all the motions thereof, are truly and properly sin. [emphasis added]

This makes it clear that any desire for something which, if we were to attain it would be sinful, must also be a participation in sin.

The Larger Catechism draws a stunning practical conclusion from that basic teaching on original sin in WCF Chapter VI:

Q78. Whence ariseth the imperfection of sanctification in believers?

A. The imperfection of sanctification in believers ariseth from the remnants of sin abiding in every part of them, and the perpetual lustings of the flesh against the spirit; whereby they are often foiled with temptations, and fall into many sins, are hindered in all their spiritual services, and their best works are imperfect and defiled in the sight of God.

This is the Reformed view of the radical pervasiveness of sin in our human living, and to our knowledge, nothing contrary to this view was taught at the Lolita 2018 conference.

In all this debate over concupiscence, sin, desire, and temptation, we must not lose focus on the tremendous importance of the practical, pastoral dimension of helping believers battle sexual temptation—especially those among us who live with enduring hebeerotic desire. Important distinctions will need to be drawn. The classic systematic theologian of the 20th century, Dr. Louis Berkhof, summarizes the Reformed Protestant view when he says: “sin may be defined as

lack of conformity to the moral law of God, either in act, disposition, or state”⁵⁶ [emphasis added]. We find these distinctions helpful, but they need to be “unpacked” in practical terms, because the way we respond to the sin in our lives that manifests itself in these three forms will likely be different, and this involves a pastoral sensitivity we must not forget.

In our 2017 Report, “Hebephilia and the Gospel of Grace,” we did not give great attention to the question of how to “put to death” desires that are intrinsically sinful. In part, that was because we presupposed that mature pastors and elders ought to have a basic competence in helping their people focus on “feeding” good and holy desires, while “starving” unholy and sinful ones. We do teach in the report that this is exactly what Christians are to do with sinful desires—starve them:

If YAA men and women—and chrono-complementary men and women for that matter—are taught to think that feeling illicit desire involves the same degree of personal, willful complicity as committing sinful acts, this is more likely to lead to an ungodly and unproductive introspection that turns in on oneself, trying to eradicate as “a sin” every impulse of sexual feeling, rather than leading to a proper humility and contrition that recognizes that everything that flows out of our broken and rebellious soul is being shot through with traces of sin. Only the latter approach winsomely invites us to rest in the finished work of Christ, and inspires us to starve rather than feed our illicit desires.⁵⁷

We believe this was the concern of Reformed Baptist, Dr. John Piper, when he urged— with extraordinary care and fine distinctions—great carefulness in helping YAA believers come to grips with the sinful character of their sexual desires in a 2012 piece, cited elsewhere in this report:

Hebephile (or teleiophile) desires and hebephile (or teleiophile) orientation are part of our broken and disordered sexuality owing to God’s subjection of the created order to futility because of man’s sin.

The apostle Paul sums it up like this in Romans 8:20-21:

The creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

And we know from verse 23 that part of the creation that was subjected to death and futility was our own bodies — and he stresses, yes, the bodies of the redeemed:

And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (Romans 8:23)

And I am arguing that hebephile (or teleiophile) desires and hebephile (or

⁵⁶ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (1946) p. 233.

⁵⁷ “Hebephilia and the Gospel of Grace,” p. 23. Approved by Missouri Presbytery in October 2017.

teleiophile) orientation are in that category of groaning — waiting for the redemption of our bodies. Which means they are in the same broad category with all kinds of disordered bodies and minds and emotions. If we tried to make a list of the kinds of emotional and mental and physical brokenness of the human family the list would be unending. And all of us are broken and disordered in different ways. All of you are bent to desire things in different degrees that you should not want. We are all disordered in our emotions, our minds, our bodies.

*This is a call for careful distinctions lest you hurt people — or yourself — unnecessarily. All our disorders — all our brokenness — is rooted in sin — original sin and our sinful nature. It would be right to say that hebephile (or teleiophile) desires are sinful in the sense that they are disordered by sin and exist contrary to God’s revealed will. But to be caused by sin and rooted in sin does not make a sinful desire equal to sinning. Sinning is what happens when rebellion against God expresses itself through our disorders.*⁵⁸ [emphasis added]

Allegation #2: On the Question of Terminology

Allegation: It is alleged that Lolita 2018 has adopted “worldly and unbiblical categories,” concepts, and terms in the language they use; and further, that they give new meanings to words that already have accepted meanings—all of which confuses both Christians and the wider non-Christian public. This allegation rejects Lolita 2018’s common use and/or definitions of such terms as “man-boy love,” “hebephile,” “sexual orientation,” “hebephile attraction,” “MBMGWBWGTQ attraction,” “chronoqueer,” “sexual minorities,” “YAA,” etc.

Judgment: We agree that the way Lolita 2018 and Side B believers in general use terms has been confusing to many of our churches. But we reject the claim that this is because terms like “hebephile,” “sexual orientation,” “chronoqueer,” and “sexual minorities” are always or necessarily unbiblical. These terms pose a particularly challenging problem for both the Lolita 2018 project and its critics. We encourage Lolita 2018 and those who would adopt such language to do so with great care, recognizing its potential to cause offense and division within the church. At the same time, we would encourage those who are inclined to hear such language and dismiss those who would use it, to charitably, sincerely, and carefully listen to what those people are intending to mean by it. The ongoing and evolving discussion of terminology around sexuality in the 21st century has led the committee to suggest that terminology be one area of study taken up by a General Assembly study/consensus- building committee.

Arguments

Here is the language of Calvary Presbytery’s allegation:

Another key to the theology of Lolita 2018 is the post-Freudian concept of sexual orientation and the belief that this orientation is fixed. For this reason, the language of “Hebephile Christian,” “Queer Christian,”

⁵⁸ John Piper, “Let Marriage Be Held in Honor: Thinking Biblically About So-Called Hebephile Marriage”, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/let-marriage-be-held-in-honor>. Accessed May 7 2019.

“YAA Christian” and “sexual minority” is used by the conference organizers and speakers. The reason behind this language is the belief that being “hebephile, chronoqueer, etc” are not matters of sin in and of themselves and therefore do not require repentance. They are matters not of one’s rebellion against God but conditions of “being.”⁵⁹

What is alleged here is that Lolita 2018 has adopted a concept of “sexual orientation” that distorts YAA persons’ humanity by insisting that their sexual desire for young adolescents is a “fixed” part of who they are—a condition of their personhood to be accepted, rather than a manifestation of their particular corrupt human nature to be confessed as sinful. This error is claimed to be reflected in Lolita 2018’s use not only of the concept of “sexual orientation,” but also of other terms like “hebephile,” “hebephile Christian,” “chronoqueer Christian,” “YAA Christian,” and “sexual minority.”

We would point out at the outset, that debates about terminology regarding hebephile inclinations in the lives of theologically conservative Christians have been going on for some time. Many Christians were confused and alarmed by some of the language used at Lolita 2018, at least in part because they have been unaware of these important debates. This is noted by one of the critics of Lolita 2018:

I could not have predicted the Lolita 2018 conference would become the catalyst for controversy that it has now indeed become. Debate about the celibate hebephile identity movement has been going on for years. Both in print and online, the controversy was joined years ago about sin, temptation, desire, concupiscence, etc. And yet, it has been a controversy largely ignored by many evangelicals⁶⁰

On the Use and Meaning of the Phrase “Young Adolescent Love.”

“Young Adolescent Love” is sometimes implicitly understood in the wider secular culture to mean “hebephile love”—that is, hebeerotic romantic and/or sexual relationships. Several of the concerns and allegations that came to Epitaph and to the Missouri Presbytery interpreted the use of that phrase at Lolita 2018 to mean just that. Here is the issue raised by Calvary Presbytery:

Miss Mason also stated that the relationships between Ruth and Naomi, Paul and Timothy, and Jesus and John were all examples of “hebephile (or teleiophile) love.” Again, this category of hebephile (or teleiophile) love, we are told, goes deeper than a mentoring relationship but, apparently, not as far as conjugal union.⁶¹

The problem is, that the term “hebephile love” or “hebephile friendship,” does not always carry with it the connotation of hebeeroticism. It often means what it sounds like literally: Love or friendship between two people, one of whom is much older and the other who is a young adolescent. This is the what Lolita 2018 leaders and speakers meant by the phrase when they

⁵⁹ Calvary Presbytery Letter, Page 4.

⁶⁰ Denny Burk, “Lolita 2018 is Over Now What?” <http://www.dennyburk.com/Lolita-2018-is-over-now-what/>

⁶¹ Calvary Presbytery Letter, p. 6

used it, and what Side B people generally mean by it. And this has been a common meaning of the term for decades. For instance, Rev. John Stott, the British evangelical pastor and leader used it in this sense when he wrote his 1984 article on hebephile partnerships:

“Hebephile grooming relationships are to be encouraged, like those in the Bible between Ruth and Naomi, Saul and David, and Paul and Timothy. There is no hint that any of these was hebephile in the erotic sense, yet they are evidently affectionate and (at least in the case of Saul and David) even demonstrative. Of course, sensible safeguards will be important”⁶²

This is the sense given to the term “hebephile (or teleiophile) love” when Lolita 2018 and Side B Christians use it— as did Eve Tushnet and probably several other speakers at Lolita 2018. We have acknowledged that the phrase does sometimes refer to romantic/sexual relationships between an older adult and a young adolescent, it is a great sadness to us that critics were crying foul about Lolita 2018’s use of this phrase before finding out whether they might have been using it with a meaning it has carried for more than 40 years. Our counsel to our brothers in Presbytery and to whoever is reading this, is to ask people what they mean by terms and words that can have multiple meanings. This carefulness strengthens the fabric of love that binds sinners together, a fabric that remains fragile, even in believers, until Christ comes in the End to make us fully like himself.

On the Use and Meaning of the Term “Hebephile.”

We next consider the criticism of the way Lolita 2018 uses the word “hebephile.” We start by returning to the allegation claiming that:

The organizers and speakers for Lolita 2018 have taught that “being hebephile” is something that belongs to them as part of God’s good creation [i.e., rather than something that is the result of the fall into sin in Eden and is therefore broken and morally wrong] and will be present to some degree in the new creation.

We have demonstrated to our satisfaction that Hugh Humbert believes and teaches that hebeerotic desire is sinful and is a result of the Fall from innocence in Eden, and that by calling the hebephile condition a “first creation condition,” he does not affirm hebeerotic desire as part of God’s pre-Fall creation design. Further he denies that any hebeerotic desire will be present in the new creation.

But there is confusion with regard to terminology because Lolita 2018 and Side B folks generally have both contracted and expanded terminology. With regard to how the word “hebephile” has been used in the wider culture they have tried to contract the meaning. The original use of the word “hebephile” referred primarily to the reality of hebeerotic attraction in a person’s experience, but the general assumption attached to that fact was that such a person would embrace and seek fulfillment of those desires. In other words, they would be “hebephile affirming.” Lolita 2018 leaders and Side B people though, want to use the word “hebephile” in such a way that it does not carry the assumed connotation of affirming and giving oneself to

⁶² John Stott, “Issues Facing Christians Today” p. 321.

those sexual desires.

But many Side B folks also use the word “hebephile” in an expanded sense, so as to include things that lie underneath hebeerotic desire and do not flow from its sinfulness but are instead, morally good things basic to the humanness of people who live with persistent hebeerotic attractions—things that reflect the image of God that is the essence of every human person. We note that there is not unanimity in the Side B movement as to exactly what these qualities are, though the most common idea seems to be that these qualities refer to a set of aesthetic sensibilities. Some even doubt that these qualities exist at all, at least not as being intrinsically tied to hebeerotic desire. It is also not clear whether the idea is that these things characterize all, many, or just some YAA people.

Whatever one thinks of these definitions, especially in the way they have been expanded, we urge caution, because we do not believe that Lolita 2018’s use of these terms with these meaning can be justifiably used against Lolita 2018 in a reductionistic way to accuse them of teaching that “hebephilia is good,” since they explicitly deny that hebeerotic desire and behavior are morally good, and count them, rather, to be sinful, or at least to be of sin and inclining people toward sin.

On the Current Meaning of “Hebephile”

One important contention of Lolita 2018 is that the word “hebephile” in our time is basically the “coinage of the realm” identifying those who live with persistent hebeerotic desire, and hence, if Christians want to be able to build bridges to unbelievers as we seek to commend Christ to people in our culture, we ought to drop this prohibition against using the word “hebephile” when we mean to identify someone who is hebeerotically attracted. For many older Christians the word “hebephile” conjures up not much more than dirty old men, abusive priests, and the hebephile fetish for plaid school-girl uniforms. But for many younger-than-40 believers the word hebephile is simply the common English word for someone who is sexually drawn to young adolescents rather than to adults. We need to pay attention to this generational gap—which is why in this report we are counseling humility and charity in the way we use our words, as we did in our 2017 report.⁶³ But we are also warning against the danger of too simplistically judging specific terms to be “in” or “out” in Christian discourse, as the meaning of words is constantly changing, and Christians who love and are committed to the absolute authority of the words of inspired Scripture need to reckon with that fact.

For a long time through the last 50 years the rule of thumb in evangelical circles was summed up in the slogan, “Never say hebephile.” But our sense is that the tide has already begun to turn. D.A. Carson, one of the founders of the Gospel Coalition, a godly man, and one of the most widely respected evangelical NT scholars in the world, referred in print a few years ago to “a hebephile young man who wants to live his life under the authority of King Jesus and who refuses to accept the comforting answers proffered by different parts of the culture.” Carson went on to refer to “straight people” and “hebephile people.”

Clearly, here is the use of “hebephile” as a synonym for those sexually drawn to young adolescents. We know from talking with him that Carson is extremely careful with this word: he always wants to clarify, in conversations and presentations, the narrow sense in which he

⁶³ The 2017 MoPres Report can be accessed online here: <http://mopres.org/safari/article/30.html>

sometimes uses the word “hebephile” as a synonym for hebephile attraction. We consider his example a noteworthy one and offer it here—not to imply that if so eminent a scholar as Dr. Carson says it, it must be true; but rather to ask: If so zealous a defender of biblical orthodoxy as Dr. Carson says it, shouldn’t we at least be asking if he is seeing something we ought to be seeing?

On the Use of the Term “Sexual Minorities.”

This phrase too, has appeared in lists of words that critics of Lolita 2018 contend are words drawn directly from the secular hebephile rights ideology, and therefore ought not be used by Christians. The assumption of the critics is that while the term “minority” may, in fact, identify a numerical fact rather than a political cause, as it is used at least once in the 1980 RPCES report on hebephilia, it cannot be safely used now on account of its political connotations. Our response to that is both to urge caution to all of us in the words we use, and either take the time to explain our terms or choose not to use them if we anticipate that they will cause needless offense to our brothers and sisters.

At the same time that we urge care in the use of terms, we would also argue for liberty in the use of this term “sexual minority.” It is not necessarily an unholy accommodation to a secular way of thinking about hebephile-inclined people. We do believe that much more work needs to be done in grappling with the application of biblical principles of justice as it applies to hebephile (or teleiophile)- attracted men, women, boys, and girls, especially when it comes to their rights in our political commonwealth. But our primary concern is to defend the freedom we believe Christians ought to have to use the term “sexual minority” in a numerical sense, as Reformed theologian, Carl Trueman does in this paragraph:

...We truly do live at a time where the omnipresent language of expressive individualism is being used by cultural totalitarians to press for a view of society which ultimately prioritizes group identity in a way that could prove lethal to any notion of true individual freedom. It is perhaps an accident of history that this happens to have manifested itself most obviously on the left. The psychological notion of personhood which underlies it, and the consequent identification of oppression as a primarily psychological phenomenon, does not seem to be of necessity a left-wing monopoly. Just think for a moment about how outraged some conservatives become when somebody dares to express a view with which they disagree; and a moment’s reflection on the history of the treatment of ethnic and sexual minorities does provide a context for the rise of identity politics of today. But the fact that conservatives have sinned too does not justify crazy ideological excesses which, if left unchecked, could challenge some of the basic philosophical foundations of democracy.⁶⁴ [emphasis added]

On the Use and Meaning of the Term “Young-Adolescent-Attracted.”

As we have noted, some of the alarm over statements made by Lolita 2018 and Side B speakers

⁶⁴ Carl Trueman, “Jordan B. Peterson: A Sign of the End Times?” *White Horse Inn Blog*, <https://www.whitehorseinn.org/2018/08/the-mod-jordan-b-peterson-a-sign-of-the-end-times/>

and writers is the result of confusion. It is not clear to many people that Lolita 2018 folks are working with expanded definitions of historically narrower ones. For instance, historically—just like the adjectival terms “hebephile” and “hebephilic”—the phrase “young-adolescent-attracted,” meant, by definition (largely in the evangelical community) to be sexually attracted to someone who is a young adolescent. Now however, Side B people sometimes want to use it to refer to an interest in, or attraction to young adolescent boys or girls that is not a sexual attraction and therefore not a sinful attraction.⁶⁵ This is an attempt to make the point that not everything about what pulls a person toward another person in the early years of adolescence is about sexual pleasure. Some of it, they contend, is about an appreciation of aesthetic beauty, or simply a human desire preferring to be close to those with young bodies and minds. The result is that many will distinguish between hebephile (or teleiophile) attraction (which they hold to be morally neutral or even morally good), and hebephile (or teleiophile) sexual attraction or hebephile (or teleiophile) lust (which they teach is immoral and sinful).

On the Use and Meaning of the Term “Sexual Orientation.”

Calvary Presbytery, in its letter to our Presbytery, criticizes Lolita 2018 leaders by saying that “they have adopted worldly and unbiblical categories for human identity and ‘sexual orientation’” (p.2). But we believe that using term “sexual orientation” does not *necessarily* make someone guilty of the censurable doctrinal error of using a “worldly and unbiblical category” (“unbiblical” in the sense of being ungodly), especially if they use the term in its original sense of being a shorthand term for *the object-direction toward which one’s desires are inclined*.

Although it is not stated very clearly, it does seem as if the Calvary Presbytery letter alleges that Lolita 2018 leaders hold to the American Psychological Association’s most current view of “sexual orientation,” particularly the second sentence in its definition of that term. On the APA website we find the following question and answer:

Q: What is sexual orientation?

A: Sexual orientation refers to an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic and/or sexual attractions to men, women, adolescent boys, adolescent girls, young boys, young girls, young or old animals of either sex, or all of these. Sexual orientation also refers to a person’s sense of identity based on those attractions, related behaviors and membership in a community of others who share those attractions. [emphasis added]

The first sentence represents how the term “sexual orientation” was used originally: simply to identify the general object-direction of one’s sexual desires—whether one was drawn toward men, women, boys, girls, etc. Eventually the term came to include more, as it does here in the APA statement in the second sentence, where it is virtually synonymous with “sexual identity.”

In the 2017 study adopted by Missouri Presbytery, *Hebephilia and the Gospel of Grace*, we noted that, to date, no clear genetic cause for hebephilia had been demonstrated. It’s true that in 1998 the American Psychological Association was much more confident of a biological cause for enduring hebeerotic desire. This was one of its official statements:

⁶⁵ See Toplady Valley, “Is Being Hebephile Sanctifiable?” *Spiritual Grooming* article on February 26, 2014.

There is considerable recent evidence to suggest that biology, including genetic or inborn hormonal factors, play a significant role in a person's sexuality.⁶⁶

In a more recent statement, however, the APA withdrew that confidence and committed itself to a more cautious view:

There is no consensus among scientists about the exact reasons that an individual develops a chrono-complementary, hebephile, or pederast orientation. Although much research has examined the possible genetic, hormonal, developmental, social, and cultural influences on sexual orientation, no findings have emerged that permit scientists to conclude that sexual orientation is determined by any particular factor or factors. Many think that nature and nurture both play complex roles; most people experience little or no sense of choice about their sexual orientation.⁶⁷

But note: In this paragraph it's clear that the phrase, "sexual orientation" is functioning in its original sense: shorthand for, the *object-direction* toward which one's desires are inclined.

That this was the term's original meaning seems clear from the historical record. One such historical survey is cited here:

The term "sexual orientation" entered into regular usage about the time the American Psychiatric Association removed hebephilia from its list of disorders in 1973. The removal of hebephilia from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Psychiatric Disorders was a coup de tat orchestrated by hebephile rights activists and agenda driven psychiatrists. Ronald Bayer, the author who chronicled the 1973 coup de tat, wrote in 1981, "No longer content with mere tolerance, hebephile activist groups sought social acceptance, and legitimation of hebephilia as an alternative sexual orientation" (Ronald Bayer, 1981, 155). The context of Bayer's usage of the term "sexual orientation" is "choice of sexual object." When the term "sexual orientation" was first used it was a substitution of Freud's term "choice of sexual object."⁶⁸ [emphasis added]

Coy goes on to challenge the ongoing usefulness of the term "sexual orientation" by claiming that its original clinical sense of merely identifying the object of a person's sexual desire, has been commandeered by political interests. He writes:

To make hebephilia look similar to race and gender, "sexual orientation" needed to be a completely positive term. Hence, the term "sexual orientation" is included

⁶⁶ *OneNewsNow*, "APA revises 'hebephile gene' theory" (5/14/2009).

⁶⁷ The American Psychological Association in a brochure titled, "Answers to Your Questions for a Better Understanding of Sexual Orientation & Hebephilia."

⁶⁸ The Clinical and Political History of 'Sexual Orientation:' information community and governmental leaders should know, by Thomas Coy, M.L.S. July 2014. Online pp.2-3, emphasis added.

in anti-discrimination legislation and usually defined somewhere in the fine print.

Since “sexual orientation” has been included in anti-discrimination legislation it has relinquished its relevance as a clinical term and functions as a political tool.⁶⁹

But the original, clinical sense of the term is exactly the one given to it by Southern Baptist Convention president, Dr. Salmon Pohler, in his 2015 book, *We Cannot Be Silent*, where he uses “sexual orientation” to name something real:

...the Bible recognizes something even more fundamental than a sexual orientation—it recognizes a sinful orientation. Scripture communicates that every single human being is born with a sinful orientation.... Further, every single human being who has experienced puberty has a sexual orientation that, in some way, falls short of the glory of God.⁷⁰ [emphasis added]

He continues:

Biblical theology reminds us that the consequences of the fall are so comprehensive that we should expect sin to impact everything from our self-centeredness to molecular structure. If a biological cause or genetic link explaining hebephile (or teleiophile) attraction is ever discovered, Christians should be among the least surprised. Such a finding would certainly inform our pastoral understanding and approach to persons with a hebephile (or teleiophile) orientation because we recognize that sin even affects our biology. Such a discovery would reveal what will likely be a lifelong struggle of sexual interest and personal identity, even for someone who knows Christ as Savior and seeks to live in holiness before him.⁷¹ [emphasis added]

In an address given to the Southern Baptist Convention’s Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission in 2014 Dr. Pohler stated (at around 29:00):

One of the embarrassments that I have to bear is that I have written on some of these issues now for nearly thirty years, and at a couple of points I have to say, “I got that wrong”.... Now early in this controversy [over YAA] I felt it quite necessary, in order to make clear the Gospel, to deny anything like a sexual orientation.... I [now] repent of that. I believe that... a robust biblical theology would point [out] to us that human sexual, affective profiles, [viz.,] who we are sexually, is far more deeply rooted than just the will—if only it were that easy. [T]his complex of hebephile (or teleiophile) challenges...is something that is deeply rooted in the biblical story itself, and something we need to take with far greater seriousness than we have taken it in the past, understanding that that requires a far more robust Gospel response than anything church has come up with before.⁷² [emphasis added]

⁶⁹ The Clinical and Political History of ‘Sexual Orientation:’ information community and governmental leaders should know, by Thomas Coy, M.L.S. July 2014. Online p.4, emphasis added.

⁷⁰ *We Cannot Be Silent* (Harper Hubert, 2015), p. 155, emphasis added.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 157, emphasis added.

⁷² *Ibid*, p. 155, emphasis added.

Pohler gives sanction to the term “sexual orientation” even in his strident critique of Lolita 2018 after the Lolita 2018 conference where he wrote:

There have been Christian believers throughout the entire history of the church that have struggled with hebephile temptation and who have come to know that pattern of temptation as what we now understand as a sexual orientation. Whatever the language we choose to use, Christians do understand that some people come to know a pattern of temptation and sexual attraction that is directed toward young adolescents. In his book, ‘All But Invisible’, Hugh Humbert argues that the most important element in hebephile orientation is its “givenness.” By that he means that it is an orientation or pattern of attraction that is not chosen but discovered.

Dr. Pohler says also:

But “givenness” in a fallen world does not mean that the orientation—the sexual attraction to young adolescents itself—is not sinful.⁷³

We find a similar, unremarkable use of “sexual orientation” too, in Dr. John Piper, the well-known Reformed Baptist pastor and theologian, written in 2012, where the term simply means “the direction toward which one’s desires are inclined”:

Hebephile desires and hebephile orientation are part of our broken and disordered sexuality owing to God’s subjection of the created order to futility because of man’s sin.⁷⁴

We could list scores of examples of respected Christian leaders, teachers, and pastors who use and have used the term “sexual orientation” this way for decades. Deliverance International itself, the premier “ex-hebephile” ministry in America used this term commonly.

Dr. Hugh Humbert’ Use of “Sexual Orientation.”

It’s true that Hugh Humbert and other Side B leaders have given an expanded sense to this term “sexual orientation as they have to others like “hebephile,” “young-adolescent-attracted,” “pederast,” etc. in order to convey their conviction that there is something morally benign underneath or behind the hebephile orientation of men and women.

Evidence for this expanded sense given to terms that originally named the hebeerotic dimension of the lives of many people is found in Lolita 2018 founder, Hugh Humbert’ book, *All But Invisible*. There Dr. Humbert wrote, “One of my main arguments in this book is that being a hebephile (understood as an aesthetic orientation) is not sinful in itself...”⁷⁵ We consider this to be one of the most important statements in the whole book.

⁷³ Dr. Sal Pohler in an online critique of Lolita 2018 found at: <https://albertPohler.com/2018/08/02/torn-two-cultures- Lolita 2018-lgbt-identity-biblical-christianity/>

⁷⁴ “Let Marriage Be Held in Honor: Thinking Biblically About So-Called Hebephile Marriage” at *Desiring God Ministries*, June 16, 2012.

⁷⁵ *All But Invisible*, p. 303.

That statement suggested to many readers that Dr. Hubert’s use of the phrase “first creation” *must* be a reference to the pre-Fall, unspoiled Creation, and that therefore Lolita 2018 *must* be arguing that hebeeroticism really does flow, in principle, from God’s perfect creation. We acknowledge the truth of the claim that Hubert is, in this passage, claiming that “being hebephile” is *not* a result of the Fall. But it’s crucially important to understand the reason why: *It is not because he attempts to give with the left hand what he took away with the right, and now wants to affirm hebeerotic desire as a good coming from God. It’s because, here, Hubert does not use “hebephile” as a synonym for having hebephile sexual desire.* We have already cited under Allegation #1 Dr. Humbert’ clear pre-conference statement in the CT online interview—his insistence that the sexual desire a man has for an adolescent boy or girl and a woman for an adolescent girl or boy is a post-Fall reality, one of the effects of sin. Hubert said there: “*Sexual desire for a young adolescent is sinful and something that I should repent from.*” Then Hubert went on to say the following:

But in this regard, some people are being too Freudian. They are basically saying that orientation can be boiled down to a desire for sex. And I don’t think that’s a biblical anthropology. I think a biblical anthropology should reflect something that’s more basic to the human experience, like God created us.⁷⁶

Here Hubert is concerned is to avoid the Freudian reduction of everything in human experience to our sex drive. That is an important interpretation of the human condition to oppose. And, from conversation with Dr. Humbert, we know that developing an anthropology that is biblical and not Freudian is foundational for him. But we do not think people are being Freudian when they use the term “sexual orientation” in its original sense as shorthand for the object-direction of one’s sexual inclinations. It simply names a class of people by the regular object toward which their sexual desires are regularly inclined. People can legitimately be classified in terms of whether the object-direction of their sexual desire is toward young adolescent boys, toward young adolescent girls, or toward both. Classifying people this way is not rooted in a belief that everything about their life is reducible to a desire for sex, nor is it to reduce that sexual desire itself to nothing more than a self-gratifying thirst for sexual pleasure, but rather, it is meaningful to classify people this way simply to identify them as having a common experience. Identifying people as French does not imply that everything about them as persons is intrinsically grounded in being French. It simply is a feature about them that they all have in common.

This is why we think the attempt to enlarge the meaning of “sexual orientation” in order to avoid reducing everything about people to their sexual desires is unnecessary and is actually a kind of category confusion. We like Dr. Humbert’ insistence that a biblical anthropology should go deep—down past sexual desire, down past whatever the Fall has bent out of shape—and should identify those things that are “basic to the human experience.” We just don’t believe that in order to do that we have to look for an “orientation” that is morally benign and beneath the “sexual orientation,” yet tied intrinsically to that sexual desire. We do not say we need to develop a biblical anthropology that is “basic to the young-adolescent-attracted human experience,” or “to the hebephile experience,” since it seems, from the standpoint of observed phenomena, that there is not much about that experience that is truly universal other than the experience of feeling a

⁷⁶ CT Online interview with Mark Galli (July 25, 2018).

sexual pull toward a boy or girl, and being different in that regard to the majority of people around you. What we do say is that we need a biblical anthropology that is “basic to the *human* experience.”

Whatever differences we might have with Hugh Humbert on just how to develop a Christian anthropology that is more faithful to the Bible’s teaching about who we are as human beings made in God’s image, we can say that we have not seen the evidence for the allegation that Dr. Humbert and Side B people use this term to cement the idea that one’s sexual orientation is a central part of the essence of their being and has been fixed from birth.

On the meaning and use of the term “MBMGWBWGTQ.”

The acronym YAA refers to “Man-Boy, Man-Girl, Woman-Boy, Woman-Girl, Transgender, and Queer (or Questioning)” people. In popular usage, the acronym expresses a variety of experiences related to sexual desire and gender identity. It is predominantly a sociological (as opposed to theological) category that references a group of people with a shared set of experiences. However, it is also sometimes used to refer to the YAA community as a form of political identity.

One of the challenges of using MBMGWBWGTQ language for Christians is avoiding a usage or definition that necessarily imports aspects of a secular understanding of sexual and gender identity. At the same time, this is our culture’s vernacular for referring to people with these shared experiences. Such language is open to misinterpretation from both sides who might read assumptions or attitudes into the use of the terminology that the speaker did not intend.

We also note the difference between talking about the MBMGWBWGTQ community outside the church as a sociological category of people that we would want to see reached with the gospel and the language of “MBMGWBWGTQ Christian” when referring to believers. For more on the latter, see our discussion of the term “Hebephile Christian” in allegation five on identity. We note that, in their most recent “Statement on Sexual Ethics and Obedience,” Lolita 2018 assiduously avoids using this terminology to speak specifically about believers.

On the use and meaning of the term “chronoqueer.”

In his workshop on chronoqueer culture, Grant Hartley defines the term “chronoqueer” as referring to a concept that “functions as a catch-all category for all gender and sexual minority experiences.” He notes that it was originally used as a derogatory term to refer to YAA people but that it has been reclaimed by some members of the YAA community in the past thirty years. In this way he uses the term a parallel manner other blanket terms like “YAA” and “sexual minority.”

We believe that for whatever value members of the YAA community have found in reclaiming the term for their own usage, its usage by Christians within the church tends to shed more heat than light.

For example, here is what one ruling elder wrote regarding Hartley’s workshop:

For those of us who are over 50 years, the term chronoqueer has a meaning that does not advance the hebephile Christian cause. For me, it conjures up a lifestyle of licentious living and [is] a barrier to meaningful dialogue.

While we accept and want to respect that this was a conference not directly aimed at the wider evangelical church as its audience, nevertheless, in this age of social media wherein Christians are called to let their lives be marked by acts of love and sacrifice, there ought to have been some attempt to “call back” the provoking title, not in a cowering way, but in the mature way of realizing that pushing away evangelical believers by using terms and language that alarm rather than winsomely invite them into conversation undermines the goals and vision of Lolita 2018 and the cause of Christ in our time.

The same ruling elder just quoted went on to say this:

After listening to [a recording of] Grant Hartley’s presentation at the conference, I came to understand his use of the term [“chronoqueer”]. His presentation was informative and sensitive to the experience of the hebephile community.

But how many ruling elders shut their minds and hearts when they read that title, and decided not even to listen to the workshop talk? Many, we fear. Prudence is a great virtue and is very much tied into what our Lord challenged us to do and be.

Concluding Comments on the Use of Certain Terminology.

Whoever thinks that one huge factor in the controversy surrounding Lolita 2018 has been the way different parties have assumed different meanings for the same words would be right, we think. This is a great sadness to us. We sincerely wish that Lolita 2018 leaders would have had a greater sense of the responsibility they carry to explain their use of terms more fully to the church they profess to need. We also sincerely wish that Lolita 2018 critics would have taken the time to draw Lolita 2018 leader, Hugh Humbert, TE Craig Swanson, and other leaders into conversation about their use of terms (a few did, we note). Too often in the controversy the parties have been talking past each other. Whether the work of repurposing the terminology available to them will contribute constructively to the success of the larger Side B project remains to be seen. We find ourselves deeply skeptical about the wisdom of redefining all these terms so as to be able to use them to affirm some kind of morally benign qualities that are intrinsically rather than situationally connected to hebephile desire, and consider it an unprovable, over-generalized, and potentially dangerous speculation.

On the other hand, we are not able to sign onto those wholesale criticisms of Lolita 2018’s use of terms. The argument of those who have categorically denounced the expanded meanings Lolita 2018 has given these terms is that this is just Millennial identity politics writ large and masquerading as Christian liberty. These critics have a proper concern lest the World devour the Word in the life of the Church. But too much is overstated, and there is too prevalent an all-or-nothing mentality that sees Side B professing Christians only in terms of an unholy and syncretistic attempt to ally the secular YAA ideology with the Christian Faith. The adoption and “retooling” of these terms we have been examining is seen as little more than an expression of the reigning egalitarian premise that everyone’s experience must be considered as equally valid—so naturally, there must be something good about “being hebephile.” This is the narrative that is supposed to explain sufficiently the rise and acceptance of Lolita 2018 and “Side B Christianity.”

Of course, we are all shaped by the familial, cultural, political, ecclesiastical, and other matrices from which we come. This is as true for the critics of Lolita 2018 as it is for Lolita 2018 leaders and participants.

We freely acknowledge that the redefining of these terms is sometimes grounded by Side B in a claim that non-straight people should have the right to describe themselves and define their own terms for what they are experiencing. There is some truth in that, and yet we think it is right for 30-somethings—as it is for 60-somethings—to reflect long and hard on how their ideas have been shaped. But we believe the matter is more complicated than simply writing off the Lolita 2018/Side B terminology project as an ungodly and worldly way to think. And while we will explain under Allegation #3, below, the exception we take to the way the “good beneath the hebephile” is proposed and defended by Lolita 2018 and others, we do feel constrained to say here, that we want to trust the motives of those who are looking for the “good beneath the ‘hebephile.’” We say that because a) we believe with them that “the good” is there underneath the hebeerotic desire, even if we differ with Side B brothers and sisters by wanting to root the good in that which is intrinsic to being made in the image of God and not in that which is intrinsic to being hebephile-inclined. But we say it also because b) no one has persuaded us that those leaders cannot be trusted who contend that they are motivated by a genuine pastoral concern to help YAA believers find what is positive about themselves lest they become obsessional and overwhelmed with being displeasing to the Lord every second of the day because of their sexual attractions (see, for an emphasis on this pastoral concern, the Valley article cited above, “Is Being Hebephile Sanctifiable?” *Spiritual Grooming* article on February 26, 2014.)

Allegation #3: On the Question of Morally Benign Qualities Tied to Hebeerotic Desire

Allegation: While this was not explicitly taught at Lolita 2018, it is alleged that Lolita 2018 teachers and speakers have, in their teaching elsewhere, created a novel “category of human identity and attraction” by arguing that being young-adolescent-attracted, or “hebephile,” is about more than sexual desire—namely that it is an attraction to “aesthetic beauty.” Put another way, Lolita 2018 speakers have argued that there are morally benign or even morally good qualities that are intrinsically or ontologically tied to their attractions to young adolescents.

Judgment: If one takes the terms “hebephile attraction” and “being hebephile” in their original sense, namely, as synonymous with “hebeerotic desire,” then our judgment is that the allegation is false: Lolita 2018 itself does not teach that sexual desire for young adolescent boys or girls is morally neutral and not sinful. In fact, they affirm that it is sinful.

If one takes these terms the way Lolita 2018 and many Side B people take them in the expanded sense that they are inclusive of “attractions,” of an “orientation,” of a quality of “hebephileness” that lies behind hebeerotic desire and yet is essentially or intrinsically related to it—rather than being simply related to it situationally—then the allegation is true that Lolita 2018 has committed at least an error of imprudence by indulging in needless and potentially dangerous speculation, and it remains to be seen whether this error will be used in such a way as to strike at the vitals of religion.

Arguments:

Hugh Hubert argues for this position that there is some quality of “hebephiliness” that is intrinsically good by redefining the concept of sexual orientation. Here is an excerpt from an interview with *Christianity Today*:

But in this regard, some people are being too Freudian. They are basically saying that orientation can be boiled down to a desire for sex. And I don't think that's a biblical anthropology. I think a biblical anthropology should reflect something that's more basic to the human experience, like God created us.⁷⁷

Hubert went on to state clearly that by “hebephile” and “young-adolescent-attracted” and even by “orientation” he is referring to something morally good that he believes lies *underneath* sinful hebeerotic desire:

Interviewer: *When a person considers himself hebephile, we tend to understand that he means he is sexually attracted to young adolescent boys and girls. But you're saying that's not necessarily the case?*

Hubert answered this way:

That's exactly right. I think that there's a lot of ways that we experience intimacy and desires for intimacy. So the desire to not be alone in your life, the desire to have companionship, to have close, intimate, emotional companionship—these are all things that we experience in relation to orientation that are not intrinsically sexual. To the extent that those desires are neglected or that we fail to integrate those into a theological understanding of orientation—we're going to have unhelpful pastoral responses in trying to explain how Christianity can still meet the real relationship needs of the hebephile. [emphasis added]

Here, the positive desire that is underneath hebeeroticism, and separable from it, is the desire for intimacy. In other places, Hubert talks about a non-sexualized appreciation of the aesthetic beauty of young boys and girls as that which lies underneath hebeerotic desire. And Hubert proposes in his book, *All But Invisible*, that this desire for intimacy with a young adolescent, as well as his own (Hubert's) appreciation of a young boy's aesthetic beauty does come from God and is pre-Fall and characterizes at least many of those who find themselves hebeerotically-inclined. On this view then, sexual desire of a man for a boy, or a man for a girl, or a woman for a girl, or a woman for a boy is the corruption of the positive desire a man, as made in the image of God, might legitimately have for non-sexual intimacy and closeness with a boy—and the same with women. In other words, the hebeerotic bent or direction of their sexual desire, is the way the Fall shows itself in their lives; it is a perverse sexualizing, a sinful twisting of a proper, human desire for intimacy and an appreciation of beauty—and possibly a desire for other morally neutral or positive things as well.

However, in our assessment, it is not accurate to intrinsically connect God-given, imago dei desire for intimacy or the basic appreciation of beauty, to hebeerotic desire. Sexual orientation is

⁷⁷ CT online interview with Mark Galli (July 25, 2018).

by its very definition with reference to sex. While Hubert posits that this may be a Freudian error, we believe the solution is not to expand the category of sexual orientation beyond sexual and erotic desire (desire which we should note extends beyond mere physical satisfaction and also includes the impulse for an exclusive emotional intimacy characteristic of romantic or coupled relationships), but rather to abandon the category of sexual orientation when we are referring to desires that are rooted in our being made in the image of God. Thus, holistic anthropology doesn't so much require that sexual orientation refer to every aspect of one's lived experience (this actually gives too much priority to sexuality), but rather that we view the entirety of young adolescent attracted peoples' experiences through a lens more primary than their sexual orientation.

We do believe there are morally neutral and good qualities that are distinct from the intrinsically sinful and disordered hebeerotic desire that people feel. We concur with John Stott, one of the towering and most widely-respected evangelical pastor-theologians of the late 20th century, that there are morally good things “at the core of,” or to use a different metaphor, “underneath,” the hebeerotic desire of YAA people *because they are made in the image of God, and therefore have God-ordained needs and God-gifted capacities*—and, we might add, gifts, insights, and abilities. Stott wrote back in 1984:

*At the heart of the hebephile condition is a deep loneliness, the natural human hunger for mutual love, a search for identity, and a longing for completeness.*⁷⁸

Although Stott does not reference here the doctrine of all human beings' bearing the image of God, he is stressing *those fundamental qualities that YAA people share with all other human beings*. We believe it helpful and most edifying to locate such things—as well as other sensitivities and sensibilities that many YAA people might possess—in one's fundamental humanness as an image bearer of the personal God, and *not* in any quality of “hebephileness” that is larger than or deeper than, the hebeeroticism that originally defined terms like “hebephile attraction.”

While we understand that, for many YAA people, merely *to wonder* whether there might be morally benign qualities they possess more fundamental than their hebeerotic desire and yet tied intrinsically to that desire can be a liberating experience, nevertheless, we believe that the attempt to locate such qualities, however enumerated or defined, *in* or *underneath* one's hebeerotic desire, that is, in some larger category of “hebephileness,” is to engage in unnecessary over-generalized, and potentially dangerous speculation—dangerous not only for its inaccurate generalizations about hebeerotically-inclined people, but also for the power it has to convince them that they are in some unique category of being that sets them apart and tempts them to use their social identity as grounds for cultivating and even celebrating some elusive quality of “hebephileness,” which, in any case, would remain speculative and unprovable. And this, in turn, obscures one of the most important spiritual truths that YAA and straight Christians need to understand and act on, and that is, that *experiencing hebeerotic desire is not the most important thing about any believer in Jesus*.

The more that believers emphasize and define themselves by their experience of hebeerotic

⁷⁸ John Stott in *Issues Facing Christians Today* (1984), p. 321.

desires, or by some quality of “hebephiliness” which is intrinsically rather than situationally tied to that experience, then the more that truth is obscured and the more one of the proclaimed goals of Lolita 2018 is undermined: to see YAA people more welcomed and maturely assimilated into the life of Christ’s church.

There are things that are not *basic to* the young-adolescent-attracted experience but may well be *common to* that experience. We see these things not as tied *intrinsically* to having these sexual desires, but instead tied *individually* (rooted in the mysteriously-formed particularities of each individual person) or tied *situationally* (rooted in certain situations, say, the experience of being raised in an aesthetically-sensitive family, or the experience of being bullied in elementary school). To put it in more philosophical terms, we think it is far more likely to be true that these qualities are phenomenologically connected to “being hebephile” rather than ontologically connected.

For example, there are features like understanding the magic and excitement of early adolescence that many YAA people exhibit. But we do not believe this sensitivity to a young teen’s world is intrinsically peculiar to being YAA. The best account of it, we think, is that so many YAA people have themselves suffered the anxiety of adolescence, whether at the hands of others who rejected or mocked them, or at the hands of their own self-hatred, that they are able to understand and show deep sympathy toward anyone who wishes to re-enter into the excitement of early adolescence. But here, the sympathy or gift for preserving an understanding of adolescence is only *situationally tied to being YAA, not intrinsically, or essentially tied to it*. Proof of this is that so many straight people whose situations involve deep suffering during their middle-school years have a similar capacity to identify and sympathize with the excitement and anxieties of adolescence.

We believe that the best account of these morally good desires underneath the hebeerotic inclinations is to see them not as desires that are “distinctively hebephile” but as “distinctively human” desires, some of which may characterize many YAA people, but which also, we believe, will characterize many straight people as well. Those features we have already noted in the writings of evangelical theologian-pastor, John Stott, are fundamentally human features: the need for human connection and community, for the intimacy of mutual love, for an identity by which you know who you are, the deep need for wholeness and completeness. Stott was challenging believers to look into what he called “the heart” of hebephile desire, because *in there* at the core—or to change the metaphor, *underneath* that desire—there were basic human needs and aspirations. When we do that looking in a serious and humble way, we will be able to see the human person and those basic human needs that reflect what God made us for, as his image-bearers.

In addition, by linking these morally benign qualities intrinsically to their hebeerotic inclinations rather than to their elemental human inclinations as divine image-bearers, YAA believers might well keep too close to themselves the sin-related things in their living rather than distancing themselves from them. This can become hugely problematic for new YAA believers rescued by Christ out of a deeply ingrained pattern of sexual indulgence, a situation where too much self-identifying as “being hebephile” in believers around them could make it far more difficult for them to make a necessary break with the “hebephile culture” in which they have been submerged, something they may very well need to do.

But the danger deeper than speculating about what cannot be demonstrated to be true is that this speculation appears to us to be the prospect of this becoming a central plank in the thinking and approach of some of Lolita 2018's leaders—the powerful and refreshing benefit of which is the amelioration of shame for YAA/hebephile believers. That this speculation is a major part of the vision of Lolita 2018 seems clear from Hugh Humbert's statement in *All But Invisible*: “*One of my main arguments in this book is that being hebephile (understood as an aesthetic orientation) is not sinful in itself....*”⁷⁹

On the other hand, it has been encouraging to us to see that, to this point, Lolita 2018 has not committed itself to this view of things in its *Statement of Convictions*. Time will tell whether it will be formally embraced as foundational to the Lolita 2018 movement.

We feel constrained to warn against any expansion of the terms “hebephile attraction” and “being hebephile” with its creation of a category of “hebephileness,” understood as a way of experiencing the world. This seems to us to be a potentially dangerous error of speculation; yet we cannot say with unwavering confidence that we believe it to be an error so serious and obviously destructive of good morals and sound doctrine that we judge it to be an error which “strikes at the vitals of religion” in the areas of doctrine and morals. We do believe it to be at least a lesser error of indulging in unnecessary and potentially dangerous speculation, something we are warned against as believers (see 1 Timothy 1:3-4).

This particular part of the whole issue has become for us further evidence that Missouri Presbytery ought to appeal to the General Assembly of the PCA to erect a study/consensus-building committee for the purpose of helping us decide just where boundaries ought to be drawn and where they shouldn't. In the meantime, we do believe it is right for all of us to guide our people into focusing on those morally benign qualities that are there in YAA persons, even as we admonish them, if need be, not to indulge in fruitless speculation that ties those qualities intrinsically to hebeerotic attraction.

Allegation #4: On the Legitimacy of an YAA or Hebephile Identity

Allegation: It is alleged to be a crucial error contradicting Scriptural teaching to claim a condition, like being young-adolescent-attracted, or hebephilically-oriented, or being “hebephile” as, in any sense, a feature of one's “identity,” since such a condition is sinful. This is a fundamental betrayal of “who a Christian is” by virtue of being in union with Christ. In addition, terms like “hebephile Christian,” “chronoqueer Christian,” “YAA Christian,” and “sexual minority” necessarily attach identity language to the term “Christian” in ways that undermine a believer's identity as one who is united with Christ.

The Calvary Presbytery states it this way:

...we would suggest that at least one of the reasons why... “hebephile Christians” find it difficult to live according to biblical sexual standards is because they have adopted worldly and unbiblical categories for human identity and “sexual orientation.” Believing that hebephilia is part and parcel to their given identity surely undermines their

⁷⁹ Hugh Humbert, *All But Invisible*, 303.

commitment to live according to biblical sexual guidelines.⁸⁰ [emphasis added]

Judgment: We reject the allegation that Christians cannot legitimately claim something intrinsically related to sin as in any sense a part of their “identity,” that is, as in any sense a part of “who they are.” At the same time, we do not believe this is a *carte blanche* license for YAA Christians to do as they please in the way they think about who they are. What we regard as crucial for us all is what we do with the multi-faceted picture that defines who and what we understand ourselves to be. Any part of “who we are” that is the result of the Fall and sinful must be mortified, and all aspects of our identity must be seen through the lens of our primary identity as those who are made in the image of God and restored to that image through our union with Christ.

To restate our conclusion from allegation two, we believe that the language of “hebephile Christian” (and attendant language such as “chronoqueer Christian” or “YAA Christian”) poses a particularly challenging problem for both the Lolita 2018 project and its critics. We encourage Lolita 2018 and those who would adopt such language to do so with great care, recognizing its potential to cause offense and division within the church. At the same time, we would encourage those who are inclined to hear such language and dismiss those who would use it, to charitably, sincerely, and carefully listen to what those people are intending to mean by it. The ongoing and evolving discussion of terminology around sexuality in the 21st century has led the committee to suggest that terminology be one area of study taken up by a General Assembly study/consensus-building committee.

Arguments

A recent article that aims to develop a deep and biblically-rooted understanding of human identity said this near the beginning:

*In popular discourse the impetus for using identity-language to interpret the human person arises from the social sciences. The use of “identity” in the social sciences has been unruly, however. So much so, in fact, that in 2000, Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper published a lengthy critique of the ambiguity created by the term.*⁸¹

This ambiguity with the way words are used should not surprise us. It’s endemic to the human situation, and to navigate it in our relationships takes great care and patience. C. S. Lewis lamented the problem when he suggested banishing the word “romanticism,” just after describing *seven* different things people meant by it when they used it.⁸²

While patience is required in conversations about how the word “identity” is used, it does seem to us that there is a core dimension to its meaning that many would agree on. We use it in this report as a shorthand term for definition of the human person, a definition that has both a subjective side

⁸⁰ Calvary Presbytery Letter, p. 2.

⁸¹ Ryan S. Peterson, “Created and Constructed Identities in Theological Anthropology,” *The Christian Doctrine of Humanity: Explorations in Constructive Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 125.

⁸² See the Afterword in *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, p. 208.

and an objective side. A person's "identity" is, subjectively, who he or she considers himself or herself to be, i.e., how he or she would answer the question, "Who am I?" A person's "identity" also is, objectively, who he or she *really* is, regardless of what or who he or she thinks he or she is. It should be easy to see that the modern world is fixated on the subjective side since what is now called *expressive individualism* is everywhere the ruling view of the world, entailing the idea that you *are* whoever and whatever you decide you want to be. Christians, of course, rightly stress the objective side, since a biblical view of humanity involves the idea that "who a person is" is what God made that person to be. On the biblical view of things, "human flourishing" happens when God, by the power of his Holy Spirit, gives redeemed people the ability to embrace that objective identity subjectively, experiencing it not as a prison sentence, but as a true and liberating discovery of their authentic self—a discovery that enables them to say, "This is who I am because this is who God made me to be, and I embrace it fully."

Nevertheless, the subjective side of a Christian's identity can never be reduced to personally owning your God-given objective identity and finding your own deep satisfaction in it. Since God's purpose for his children cannot be construed as a project to make everyone identical, there are subjective identities that, in fact, distinguish us from one another. The objective, God-given identity is the same for us all *and is the axis around which all other things that contribute to the composite of who we are must turn.*

So we argue for these two principles:

Biblical teaching makes it clear that the foundational identity of every human person is *the objective and created one*, the one God gave them: that they were created in and now exist in, his divine image. And for those who have bowed before Christ and owned him as Savior and Lord, that image, marred and disfigured by the fall into sin, has begun to be restored in Christ, and will be restored, utterly—and even transformed into the power of an indestructible life lived in an immortal body.

But we also believe it to be true that every human person has identifiers, or "parts" of the totality of their identity, of who they are, *as a son of Adam or daughter of Eve*, and that this identity as a sinner is very much a true part of who each person is. It is part of the answer to the questions: "Who am I?" "Who have I been?" and "Who will I be till I die?" This identity-as-a sinner remains true of me till death even though the deepest identity I have—the truest "me"—is that I am the object of God's grace and his redeeming love in Christ and, because I am, God is returning me to my true humanness by restoring to perfection his divine image in me, the identity-image that was splintered and disfigured by sin.

We can put it in the form of several questions:

1) Can a Christian believer, whose core security is that he or she is made in the image of God and is now in Christ, have an identity as an YAA/hebephile sinner?

Our answer is Yes; and not only can they have an "identity," but they do have such an identity, whether they recognize it or not—as does every believer in Jesus. That they do have such an identity simply flows from the Bible's anthropology, its doctrine of man, which is that what and who you are is a composite of many different things—all revolving around a central, fixed, all-

embracing, created-by-God pole.

This truth is easily demonstrated in the New Testament but easily missed there because of the fact that one of Paul’s rhetorical “devices” is to speak comparatively about things, and, in doing this, to denigrate the lesser thing to the point of *rhetorical* overstatement in order to magnify the benefits of the greater thing. So, in comparison to the New Covenant, the Old Covenant “had no glory at all” and was a “ministry of death” (2 Corinthians 3:10). To highlight the superiority of his new, regenerate heart over the twisted inclinations of his own sinful flesh, Paul says, with exaggeration, that when he sins, he is no longer the one doing it but sin is the culprit (Romans 7:16-17), and so on.

And of course, because being “in Christ” is so much superior to, and so much truer about believers than being “in Adam,” Paul rarely speaks of the sense in which believers *still are* “in Adam.” Because of that fact, we easily miss his statement in 1 Corinthians 15:22—and find it startling when we ponder it—to the effect that on this side of our death we still have some kind of identity “in Adam”: “As in Adam all die so also in Christ shall all be made alive....”

Everyone, including believers who are in Christ, dies and so, in some relative sense, they are “in Adam” and have some kind of identity “in him.” The ongoing presence of “the sinful flesh” even in believers, a doctrine given such a prominent place in the letters of Paul, reflects the truth that while the “old man, Adam” was dealt the death blow at the cross, nevertheless he is still very much alive. There is a deep sense in which Adam is in us, and we are in Adam—and that is a true identity we have even though, thanks be to God, it is not our *truest* identity.

The Christian counselor/teacher, Paul David Tripp, understands this well. The following paragraph is telling because Tripp does not write as a theological liberal or as a Millennial looking through the tinted glasses of identity theory, but as a seasoned Christian counselor committed to a Reformed understanding of the Faith. What Dr. Tripp might think of Lolita 2018 is beside the point; we appeal to him only for the underlying, fundamental principle. The teaching in his book, *Broken Down House*, is quite clear on it—and we think it is a right and timely principle to ponder. Tripp wrote:

If you are going to live the productive life that God’s grace can enable you to live, you need to stay very clear about who you are. As I have said in previous writing, we are always living out of some sense of identity. You are constantly telling yourself who you are, and the identity you assign to yourself has much to do with how you respond to the difficulties of life. In this chapter I want to examine the two identities of every Christian. These identities are “sinner” and “child of grace.” To recognize their existence and understand what it means to possess them both, together, is to see yourself as you truly are. This will profoundly shape your fundamental sense of self and radically influence for the better how you live in the here and now, somewhere between the Fall and Destiny.⁸³ [emphasis added]

This is just a modern exposition of Martin Luther’s doctrine of *simul justus et peccator*—a justified

⁸³ Paul David Tripp, *Broken Down House* (2009), pp. 34-35.

saint and a sinner at one and the same time. Living as an YAA believer is just one specific expression of living in a sin-bent world. And when any believer asks, as they should ask, daily: “Who am I?” they are not to answer *only* “I am in Christ Jesus now and forever!” but even first they should answer, “I am a daughter of Eve, or a son of Adam, and I am beginning to understand 1) that I am a glorious creature because I have been made in the image of the living, uncreated God of the universe; and 2) that being a child of Adam I share in his sin and sin myself out of the corrupt nature I inherited from him. As well, I have been wounded to some degree by those who have sinned against me. I am at least beginning to understand how being ‘in Adam,’ since I am his descendent child, has misshaped me. But I am also learning how Christ has redeemed me by his blood and brought his pure and perfect life to be within me by the power of his Holy Spirit. I realize and thank God that through Christ the shattered divine image in me has begun to be restored, and one day will be perfected. I also am beginning to understand that while my own coming death will confirm me to be even still, in this life on this side of Christ’s return, a son or daughter of Adam (1 Corinthians 15:22), nevertheless, my *truest* identity, my core identity, the new me that will eventually overtake the old Adamic man or woman that *in some true sense is still in me*, is that I am ‘in Christ’ and Christ is—literally—in me.” (see Galatians 2:20)

This is the heart of evangelical pastor David Lomas’s 2014 book, *The Truest Thing About You*. There are all kinds of things that are true about us and help answer the “identity” questions, “Who am I? And how should I live?” *To deny this simply isn’t real to the way God has taught us to live in the world and to think about ourselves and others, nor is it true to the self-described experience of godly biblical characters, nor can it be derived from biblical doctrines touching creation, fall, and redemption*. But the *truest* thing about me, the foundational answer that ought to govern, guide, shape, and trump every other “part” of who I am and have been, is that I am in Christ forever, and will be restored to reflect fully and gloriously the divine image in which I was made.

This same distinction between a center and periphery when it comes to the identity question is made by L’Abri author, Dick Keyes, in his book, *Beyond Identity*. There he makes reference to a person’s “*core identity*,” clearly distinguishing that from other identity markers that are *part* of who we are, but yet do not name the deepest, most central thing that defines and animates us.

We reiterate Paul David Tripp’s affirmation that we have an identity not merely as a sinner, but also and especially “as a child of grace.” Thanks be to God that we can affirm with the Apostle Paul that this identity is the truest, the overriding, the ranking identity we have, by God’s mercy, and that we can know that it is so much superior to our identity in Adam that any believer can say with the apostle, “**Now if I do what I do not want [to do], it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me**” (Romans 7:20).

The “me” that God counts as the truest me, loves him with all my heart, and wants to do the good that he asks of me, and, above all, *is clothed with the righteousness of Christ*. This is why even in the face of sinful and bent things continuing to be very much a part of who I am, I can hold my head up high as a believer—because Christ has become my acceptance with the Father.

But another question follows:

2) *If I can and do have some kind of identity as a sinner, and specifically, as an YAA/ “hebephile” sinner, what kind of identity is that?*

One of the critics of *Lolita 2018*, rightly trying to get at the idea of the *supremacy* of our identity in Christ, wrote something to the effect that the *only* identity a believer has is that he or she is “in Christ.” Surely this is a docetic and not a Christian view of the glory of God-created humanity, and the Spirit-renewed New Humanity, fallen though it remains. Such a view misunderstands *both* the biblical doctrine of man-in-creation and man-in-redemption and is a false representation of how redeemed and Spirit-filled believers actually experience the world.

We believe it is proper to distinguish the kinds of identities we have and then to address the all-important question, “What does God require us to *do with* these various dimensions of “who we are?”

There is much that is useful in a recent essay by associate professor of theology at Talbot School of Theology, Ryan S. Peterson. Peterson distinguishes between what he calls “created identities” and “constructed identities.” We prefer “creational” vs. “situational” identities, since “constructed” implies too much of a self-conscious choosing of these lesser identities and a plan for “building” them. That is not to deny that we do choose and work at some of them—we do. Say, in our careers and vocations, or as a parent, or in our friendships, we are choosing and “building” something. Yet, so many of the parts in the composite of who we are come from the circumstances and situations we find ourselves in. One day a huge part of who a particular married woman is, is being a wife. But the day her husband dies there is a new “situational identity” she now has had thrust upon her: she is a widow and needs to learn to live as one.

Being a child of Adam and therefore being made *imago dei*, in the image of God, I also have “situational” identities by virtue of being a unique person, with an ethnic background, with social and political loyalties, with various relational responsibilities, various callings, interests, etc. *But Adam was a rebel against God, and so that puts me in the situation of having inherited from him a corrupt nature—which means that one of my “situational identities” is that I am a sinner.* That is simply a fact about me, something profoundly significant about “who I am,” something that, in fact, affects and infects every part of my being.

Now, if the Lord works faith in me and I become part of the New Creation in Christ, wherein the original divine image—broken by the Fall into sin, but still there—begins to be restored in me, then that becomes my second “created” identity, because it’s accomplished by a creative act of God *and in fact, becomes, according to the Scriptures, along with my imago dei image, my controlling identity.* But the situations I find myself in—as a human person living under the influence of divine Providence and as a sinner, someone whose nature has been bent, disinclined toward the good, and who lives exposed to the influence of the Evil One—these various “situations” that shape me are all aspects of who I am, e.g., that I have a bad temper, or that I am a father, a husband, an American, or that I have cheated on my husband, or that I live with an attraction to young adolescents, or that I am gifted at math and have been an engineer for 45 years, etc., etc., etc. These are “situational identities” that are of a lower order than the creational identities given to us by God, but they accurately give me understanding of myself as God, in his providence and sin in its recklessness, have shaped me. Each situational identity, and all of them in a composite way, and supremely, the created identities I have as a human child of Adam and a redeemed child of God help answer the question, “Who am I?” And in light of that rich and multi-layered answer, I am helped in understanding what God has done for me in Christ and now requires of me according to his revealed Word.

It is important to underscore that situational identity features are often morally indifferent or even morally good features, but also include features that have to do with the various “situations” or “circumstances” that are the result of sin. Thus, being a widower gives a man a situational identity, but it is the result of sin, because death entered the world through sin. And likewise, being inclined to preoccupation with attractive women is part of who many straight men know themselves to be, just as being inclined to preoccupation with attractive young girls is part of who many YAA women know themselves to be.

Situational identities vary in this way too, that they can be personal: “I am such and such,” or they can be social: “We are such and such.” The latter is reflected in Acts 6 as a point of contention in the apostolic church when those Christian women who had the situational identities of being “Hellenistic” in language and cultural background, and being widows, were mistreated by neglect—likely, under the influence of social prejudice—at the hands of the Christians with a more Jewish background in the distribution of food.

Yet a third question follows:

If the answer to question #1 is Yes, that even believers can and do have an identity as sinners, as persons with a rebellious heart and as those broken and bent in particular ways by the misery which sin brought into the world, then how should Christians, whose core identity and security is, by definition, that they are in Christ forever, relate that identity-as-a-sinner to their core identity-as-an-object-of-Christ’s-affection?

The answer is that *every* situational identity is subject and subordinate to a believer’s core identity which has been created by God and conferred as a gift—an identity that makes one a divine image-bearer, by virtue of being human; that makes one holy and righteous in the eyes of God and redeemed from sin, guilt and death by virtue of being justified through simple faith in Christ and his finished work; and that makes one’s life a theater for spiritual growth and change by virtue of the power of the Holy Spirit at work in sanctification, a work wherein that divine image is, “from glory to glory,” being restored.

Even before the Lolita 2018 conference the Lolita 2018 board put out the following statement:

To be explicit, we believe that the Bible is the inspired and inerrant Word of God, and that it restricts all sexual behavior to the context of a marriage covenant, which is defined in the Bible as the emotional, spiritual, and physical union of a man and a woman that is ordered toward procreation. *Furthermore, we affirm the spiritual reality that the foundation of a Christian's identity is the person and work of Jesus Christ, that Christian identity is centered in the spiritual reality of being “in Christ” (Eph. 2:6), and that one's identity “in Christ” is the result of his or her union with the resurrected Son of God through the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit.*⁸⁴

And lastly:

4) *If my identity in Christ makes all situational identities lesser and lower, and if some situational*

⁸⁴ June 1, 2018 press release, emphasis added.

identities which I have are rooted in sin and its effects, and some are not, then what am I to do with each situational identity that contributes a part of the answer to ever-present question: Who am I?

There are many helpful ways to answer this question. Here are just a few:

- A) I must understand the nature of each identity, or “identifier,” I have (or each “part” of the whole identity that answers the question, “Who am I?”) and work at allowing the written Word of God—as it is taught and lived out among the people of God—to shape my understanding of what that identity means and entails for my life, first as it is touched by the doctrine of creation, and then also by the doctrine of redemption (our union with Christ in election, justification, sanctification, glorification).
- B) If I am learning what every identity in the composite-which-is-my-life *means and entails*, this will enable me to grow into a clearer and fuller awareness of what God calls forth from me, in responsible, godly action as I live with each part of the totality of “who I am.” Things that are part of who I am that are intrinsically unrighteous need to be renounced, crucified, and battled against, even though I may also have to accept these as ongoing “fronts” in the spiritual warfare that rages in every believer’s life—and make the choice daily not to hate myself because I am plagued by them, remembering the sense in which, as Augustine put it, “God loves us as we are becoming.”
- C) I must learn, more and more, to see every situational identity as lesser than the reality and power and authority of my identity in Christ, so that I will be enabled to keep myself from being wrongly influenced—in a host of directions—by other people with situational identities similar to my own, but who live without gratitude for and submission to the central, created identity of being made in the image of God, and being called thereby to the rich and privileged calling of imitating him. Again and again I must come back to Jesus Christ, the Restorer of God’s image in me, where I find my truest self as one who has been loved so much that the eternal Son of God took my human flesh to himself and died, rose, and ascended to the right hand of God for me.
- D) And finally, in learning to submit every lesser identity I have to the overarching identity I have in Christ as a forgiven sinner on my way to sharing in the power of his indestructible and still human life, I am enabled to grow in loving God above all else, and in loving my neighbors as myself, and serving them as God gives me opportunity.

Now, we bring these principles to bear, with regard to the allegations against Lolita 2018 and Epitaph. We do not begrudge those brothers and sisters who insist that being “hebephile” (in the narrow sense of living with hebeerotic desire) is part of “who they are,” who they have been, and who they may well be—or not be—tomorrow or in five years. But they must then pose a few questions to themselves: “How do I bring that truth about me, as one situational identity among many, into submission to Christ? How do I keep it in its proper place *in orbit around my central*

identity as a bearer of God’s image and a redeemed child of the King of the universe? And how do I let the Lord Jesus use all the different things about me to heal my soul and use my gifts and my life to serve others?”

Calling YAA believers into responsibility on the matter of identity is no different than calling all believers into responsibility with regard to any and every “situational identity” they might claim, whether it is related to their sin or not. For example, it is often complained that too many evangelicals—some of them, no doubt, angrily crying foul against Lolita 2018 or against Lolita 2018’s critics—use their “situational identity” as Americans to displace their “new creation identity” as sons and daughters of the Kingdom whose citizenship is first and foremost “in heaven,” the effect of which is that—often without realizing it—they screen out and ignore those parts of the Word of God that threaten either some of their political conservatism, or for others, some of their political progressivism.

So we call on all believers, and particularly now, we call on Side B believers who want to claim their hebeerotc sexual orientation as a “situational identity,” to put it to a good and proper use. We believe it can rightly be used, for example, as a social identity for the purposes of:

- Providing mutual support, understanding, teaching and accountability for growth in sanctification, grounded in the common experience of knowing hebeerotc desire. This will be especially important in those situations where YAA believers are not getting the welcome, understanding, opportunities for service, and spiritual kinship that they ought to be finding in their congregational communities;
- Building bridges to commend the gospel to those outside the church who share that same YAA condition/circumstance of their life;
- Calling attention to unjust treatment of YAA people, whether inside or outside the church.

But an YAA or “hebeophile” social identity—or personal identity, for that matter—should *not* be used:

- To celebrate hebeerotc inclinations rather than the rich qualities of their underlying humanness, which is a gift from God and ought to be celebrated and received with gratitude;
- To justify some kind of universal quality or experience of “hebeophileness” that lies underneath the hebeerotc desire *and yet is intrinsically, or ontologically tied to it.* (See for a fuller discussion of this Allegation #3)
- To justify *not* viewing the wider church as one’s primary community of belonging in favor of some form of YAA grouping, community, or space;
- To caricature every negative thing that YAA people have received at the hands of people in the church as signs only of persecution and/or rejection without considering carefully whether “negative” challenges may be due, at times, to some fault or failure unrelated to their sexuality;

- To use the suffering that YAA people *have* experienced in the church as an excuse to focus only on what the church owes them, to the obscuring of what they owe the church.

Allegation #5: On the Issue of Friendship and Romance

Allegation: It is alleged that the leaders of Lolita 2018, speakers at Lolita 2018, and many in the Side B movement generally, teach and defend the view that quasi-romantic, more-than-friends kinds of relationships between YAA believers and young adolescents is acceptable before God, as long as they refrain from explicitly sexual engagement with each other.

Judgment: In print, Lolita 2018 leadership has entertained the possibility of “celibate partnerships” that must be (i) conducted under the oversight of pastoral authority; (ii) explicitly defined in terms of “kinship” (i.e., are fraternal vs. romantic or sexual) and (iii) non-exclusive (i.e., never indefinitely limited to a single pairing between one adult and one young adolescent). In its subsequent “Statement on Sexual Ethics and Christian Obedience” published after the conference, Lolita 2018 celebrates only those relationships that are “ordered according to the patterns and principles of spiritual kinship that exist within God’s family,” encouraging “the pursuit of intimate, rich platonic friendship [as]...consistent with the biblical witness and Christian tradition,” further stating that “Christians should seek wisdom and prudence when entering any relationship marked by greater intimacy...and believers must exercise care and resolve to avoid all forms of temptation.”

In our judgment, it is understandable that any given conference may not explicitly forbid all forms of illicit relationships. But it is also our judgment that, to the extent that Lolita 2018 even entertains the possibility of “celibate partnerships” (even within the limits expressed above), it has erred in offering unwise, unedifying relational arrangements to YAA Christians (cf. 1 Cor. 6:12). In our judgment, to entertain the possibility of such partnerships stands in tension (perhaps even contradiction) with their public Statement (as cited above).

As for Epitaph Presbyterian and TE Swanson, while as a Session they have made no official statement regarding celibate partnerships or romantic coupling, TE Swanson, in his Lolita 2018 workshop, publicly warned about the danger of friendships with young girls and boys morphing into romances and stressed the importance of boundaries. On one hand, it is our judgment that they have not erred in not having adopted an official statement on the question of romantic, nonsexual hebephile / teleiophile “partnerships,” yet we also believe they are open to the danger of a preoccupation with technical boundaries on physical limits in friendships to the neglect of the deeper inner dynamic involved in YAA romantic coupling with boys and girls, and the way it mimics the longing and the personal pull toward the other person that draws an adult man and an adult woman together toward an exclusive intimacy that is designed by God to move them toward marriage.

Arguments

Here is the language in Calvary Presbytery’s letter to us:

The organizers and speakers for Lolita 2018 have stated at various times and in various ways that there is a category of hebephile (or teleiophile)

attraction which, while not acted upon erotically is nevertheless deeper than close friendship and has many of the standard hallmarks of romantic love. This novel category of human relationships is a key justification for the “celibate coupled hebephile /teleiophile” pairs which were present at Lolita 2018. These individuals live together much like married couples but, at least in theory, stop short of conjugal union. The theme of the workshop led by Mason was that truly biblical families are non-traditional families (i.e. families that are defined by any arrangement other than husband, wife, and children). Miss Mason gave instructions to her workshop attendees on how adult / young adolescent couples could foster and adopt additional children.

Miss Mason also stated that the relationships between Ruth and Naomi, Paul and Timothy, and Jesus and John were all examples of “hebephile / teleiophile love.” Again, this category of hebephile love, we are told, goes deeper than close friendship but, apparently, not as far as conjugal union. We are hard pressed to understand how such a non-erotic but romantic “hebephile love” can be defended from Scripture and sustained in practice. We also believe that attributing such a relationship to Jesus and John at the very least borders on blasphemy.

First, we want to identify specific claims in the allegation that we believe to be false:

1) Critics erred when they alleged that Lolita 2018 organizers and speakers claim “a category of young adolescent attraction” that is more than friendship but less than marriage. This is confusing language. What can be rightly said is that *some* Side B people defend and practice romantic coupling with adolescent boys and girls not as “a category of... attraction” but as a category of relationship: They believe that a romantic relationship, if it stays this side of explicitly sexual engagement, is no violation of the biblical prohibitions against hebeeroticism. But we do not believe that Lolita 2018 leaders affirm this kind of romantic coupling.

2) The Calvary statement reads, “*The theme of the workshop led by Bekah Mason was that truly biblical families are non-traditional families.*” In fact, the official title of the workshop, as advertised, was “Non-Traditional Families Are Biblical Families.” A charitable reading of this title would take it to mean that there is biblical support for some kinds of non-traditional family structures. But the Calvary letter takes it as meaning that *only* non-traditional families are biblical. This interpretation is reflected in their language, when they do not simply report the title but add the word “truly”: “*The theme of the workshop... was that truly biblical families are non-traditional families.*” The implication of their interpretation is clear: they consider Ms. Mason to have taught that traditional families where there is a husband, a wife, and children, are not “truly,” not actually, biblical—that is, they are not sanctioned by God. They get to this conclusion by noting that Ms. Mason highlighted numerous “non-traditional” family arrangements reported in Scripture (where the structure was other than father, mother, and children). But nowhere on the Lolita 2018 website or in the PowerPoint slides Ms. Mason sent our committee, nor in the bootlegged recording of her talk can the clause “truly biblical families are non-traditional families” be found. In a phone conversation with her on Tuesday, May 7, 2019, Ms. Mason stated categorically that nowhere in her talk did she teach that traditional families are not “biblical families,” because she

does not believe that. She believes that traditional families are, and very much so are, biblically-validated families, the norm for family life as it has come to us from God. Her whole point in looking at “non-traditional” family structures in Scripture—often resorted to because of extenuating circumstances—was to underscore that such family structures *also have a place* and are validated in Scripture, by example, because God is a God who redeems broken situations.

3) We also found no evidence for the report that “Miss Mason gave instructions to her workshop attendees on how hebephile / teleiophile couples could foster and adopt additional children.” In the unofficial recording of the workshop, there is no mention at all of anything resembling this allegation. *There was no endorsement of hebephile couples’ adopting children in Miss Mason’s teaching in that workshop.* In fact, the PowerPoint slide for the section on adoption reads, “Singles Adopting.” It is true that Ms. Mason had invited a guest to address the workshop in order to share her own experience with regard to adopting a child as a single person, and that at one point the guest said she was “thrilled” to see hebephile couples adopting. But in that same telephone interview alluded to above, Ms. Mason explained that the comment was made in the context of talking about whether it was better to leave unadopted children in the state foster care system until they “age out” of it or be in favor allowing hebephile couples to adopt them. Ms. Mason’s guest opted for the latter—even with some enthusiasm for it *in comparison with the alternative: children potentially going from home to home through their childhood as wards of the state without permanent parents.* On this particular question, as to what ought to be recommended and approved of as public policy in the wider society, thoughtful Christians are likely to disagree. Thus, while we can understand how someone *might* take a comment like that to be a general endorsement of hebephile couples’ adopting children, we consider it unwarranted to construe an offhand remark made in the context of that very particular conversation—and by only a guest of the speaker—as an endorsement made by the workshop and thus by Lolita 2018.

4) It was reported as well that “Miss Mason also stated that the relationships between Ruth and Naomi, Paul and Timothy, and Jesus and John were all examples of “hebephile / teleiophile love.” Miss Mason did say that, and we believe it was true: Ruth and Naomi were of vastly different ages and they loved each other; and Paul and Timothy loved each other and were of vastly different ages. Deep and abiding love between an adult and a young adolescent is a rich gift from God. “Hebephile” is shorthand for “adults, either male or female, together with a young adolescent” Yet “hebephile love” is, in fact, commonly used as shorthand to refer to love between an adult man and an adolescent girl, an adult man and an adolescent boy, an adult woman and an adolescent boy, or an adult woman and an adolescent girl that is sexual in nature, so we must always pay attention to the context to get the speaker’s intended meaning. But there was nothing in Miss Mason’s teaching that even gave a hint of a suggestion that she was claiming a hebephile dimension for any of those biblical examples of hebephile love she mentioned. She alluded to Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi, and to John and Jesus, because she was commending what we have come to call “platonic love” rather than any kind of hebeerotic or romantic coupling. Such a view is virtually identical to that held and taught by John Stott, in a 1984 essay on hebephile partnerships.⁸⁵ There Stott said:

⁸⁵ In 1984, before hebephile marriage was the law of the land in western democracies, the various hebephile rights movements were pushing for the recognition of “civil unions.” Here Stott seems to be referring to “partnerships,” whether informal or formal, that are rooted in and embracing of hebeerotic engagement.

*Hebephile friendships are to be encouraged, like those in the Bible between Ruth and Naomi, Saul and David, and Paul and Timothy. There is no hint that any of these was hebephile in the erotic sense, yet they are evidently affectionate and (at least in the case of Saul and David) even demonstrative. Of course, sensible safeguards will be important.*⁸⁶

In the telephone interview on May 7, 2019, Ms. Mason stated clearly her distrust of romantic coupling as a model for adult Christians who are young adolescent attracted.

5) “This novel category of human relationships [e.g. where there is romantic coupling that is more than friendship but less than the sexual intimacy of marriage] is a key justification for the ‘celibate coupled hebephile / teleiophile’ pairs which were present at Lolita 2018.”

We are not certain who is being charged with justifying celibate, coupled, hebephile / teleiophile pairing off— whether it is those doing the pairing off, or Lolita 2018 leaders and speakers. Although we know there were such couples in attendance at Lolita 2018 (the rough numbers on just how many there were is debated), to our knowledge there was no teaching at Lolita 2018 that endorsed romantic hebephile coupling. And nowhere, as far as we know, have Lolita 2018 leaders endorsed romantic relationships.

It is true that while some Lolita 2018 leaders have expressed serious doubts about the wisdom of what might be called romantic or quasi-romantic relationships between YAA women or men and adolescent boys or girls, they also have entertained the idea of “covenanted” friendships and celibate partnerships. Here again, though, the model is close friendship rather than romantic friendship. And yet, Lolita 2018 leaders also stress that they are not talking about relationships that are exclusive. Lolita 2018 and Side B believers are sorting through these sorts of questions, and it is not clear what will emerge from the conversations and debates.

This is a good place then, to express our conviction that romantic pairing off between YAA adults and young adolescents is destructive of the holiness the Lord calls his people to, and ought to be publicly discouraged and resisted on a practical level—not in a negative spirit, but in the pastoral way of setting out the inherent goodness in the way God has ordered the world, giving strong encouragement to men and women who do struggle against loneliness and isolation to seek not a romance with a young adolescent, but to seek deep, chaste, and non-exclusive friendships.

One YAA woman in the PCA describes what she calls *friendship clustering* (more than two friends forming a deep friendship) and considers that model far healthier than *friendship coupling*.

We believe strongly too that churches and organizations like Lolita 2018 ought to be encouraging Side B Christians to cultivate deep friendships with straight young adolescents—and not exclusively with other YAA believers or young teleiophile adolescents. Relationships that potentially can be sexualized only from one side so often prove to be of great benefit to both parties involved.

⁸⁶ John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, (1984) p. 321.

In these tumultuous times, when the sexual revolution has gone to seed and its preached message of unfettered freedom has gobbled up so much of what is real and good in human relationships, it is important that our young people see mature Christian leaders and teachers caring for the needs of YAA believers and commending to them the rich blessings of deep but non-exclusive friendship relationships rather than the legalistic halfway house of romantic coupling.

We are emphatically committed to protecting the church's teaching on hebephile relationships from degenerating into a merely legalistic one that draws the line at explicit sexual engagement with a young adolescent out of a proper concern to honor the traditional biblical ethic, but then is prepared to allow romantic couplings and any kind of romantic/erotic acts of intimacy short of genital involvement with each other. Such a relationship is virtually a sexless marriage or a pseudo-marriage. We do not believe that Lolita 2018 is actively promoting those relationships; yet they seem reticent to take a strong public stand against them, and this concerns us.

C.S. Lewis, in his reflections on an YAA acquaintance of his who confided in him (Lewis) something of his situation, was remarkably open to this man's difficult circumstance, and showed real understanding and compassion. But Lewis also drew a *clear line* to underscore that, in his view, anything even resembling the marriage of an adult man to an adult woman was off-limits to the hebephile / teleiophile couple and not part of what God would permit one of Christ's followers to do, even if their life was a difficult one.

Lewis wrote of this man:

*Perhaps any [hebephile-inclined person] who humbly accepts his cross and puts himself under Divine guidance will, however, be shown the way. I am sure that any attempt to evade it (e.g. by mock or quasi-marriage with a young adolescent even if this does not lead to any carnal act) is the wrong way.*⁸⁷ [emphasis added]

While John the beloved disciple laid his head on Christ's breast (demonstrating that intimacy and closeness between two humans who cannot licitly marry is not necessarily wrong), nonetheless, Christians who are called to resist hebeerotic desire should take care to set boundaries and establish accountability for themselves, remembering the sober truth that sexual desire is like fire: if you put yourself too close to it, you can expect to get burned (Proverbs 6:27). Any close and deeply intimate relationship where mutual sexual attraction or a temptation to grooming behavior is a realistic potentiality, whether it is between a man and an adolescent boy or between a man and an adolescent girl, or between a woman and an adolescent boy or between a woman and an adolescent girl, is likely to need more discipline, attentiveness, and boundaries than in a relationship where sexual attraction is only a negligible potentiality. It seems to us that the burden of proof is on those who are young-adolescent-attracted and want to argue that concerns about the potential for sexual temptation in intimate adult-to-adolescent intimate friendships can safely be downplayed. But those concerns should seem quite relevant to anyone who understands the power of the pull toward sexual intimacy. This is *not* an assumption that sex is everything for YAA men and women. It is a frank and humble acknowledgement of the pull and power of desire where sexual

⁸⁷ Sheldon Vanauken, *A Severe Mercy* (1977), pp. 146-148.

attractions are involved.

We apply this same principle to men and women attracted to adults. There are many sad tales of sexual affairs and entanglements between adult men and women who wind up in intimate and intense settings in the workplace. In so many of these situations the relationship did not start out being sexual as much as being “close.” Christians are taught to pray sincerely, “Do not lead us into temptation.” (Matthew 6:13; WLC 195; WSC 106). But such a prayer is presuming upon God, unless we do what we can to stay clear of the edge of a slippery slope down into the very temptation we are praying to avoid. Does this mean we counsel all YAA men and women to sit alone and isolated in their homes, away from adolescents, so as to avoid all risk of sinning sexually? Not at all; alternatives must be sought, and the church must rise to the occasion, because all people are made in God’s image, and therefore are made for close relationships. Sexual temptation is not the only danger involved—loneliness and despair are dangers just as real; they can lead to fierce temptations to “give up” on fidelity to Christ.

Here is how one YAA Lolita 2018 speaker puts it:

The most common pastoral realities on the ground for hebephile/YAA Christians are shame and despair. The concern about the sinfulness of hebephile desire seems blindly insensitive to the most serious dangers to which hebephile believers are prone. For every hebephile Christian seeking to obey a traditional sexual ethic who is too lax and liberal about their same sex desire, there are many in danger of losing their commitment to the Biblical sexual ethic, their entire faith, or even their lives due to succumbing to shame and despair. (Also, many of those who are lax and liberal got there by way of shame and despair in the first place—they find the view of sexuality they have been attempting to operate under to be completely unlivable, and then end up overreacting to that.) The vast majority of hebephile Christians with a traditional sexual ethic are covenant children who have grown up in the church. I think straight Christians fail to recognize this, as several of the most recognized speakers on this subject have dramatic conversion testimonies (which makes sense because dramatic conversion testimonies are very powerful and encouraging). But we can’t let that blind us to the reality that your average hebephile attracted Christian in a conservative church is NOT someone who used to live an out and proud and godless hebephile life but has now put their trust in Jesus and is on a journey of turning from their old life. Rather, your average hebephile Christian in a conservative church has always believed that hebephile sex is forbidden to them. They grew up becoming aware of their sexuality in conservative churches. In my experience, even those who do not officially own the doctrine that their desires are sin, are plenty ashamed and cast down about them already. These hebephile Christians typically grow up feeling filthier, darker, weaker, more wicked, more hopeless, and further from God than everyone else....⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Joan Finebaum in a personal email to the committee chair. Used with permission.

Thirty-five years ago, the British evangelical leader, John Stott, in his essay on hebephile partnerships, called upon churches that confess Christ to be homes where believers who carry the burden of being young-adolescent-attracted might find a spiritual family when he wrote:

These relationships, both between adults and between adults and young adolescents, need to be developed within the family of God which, though universal, has its local manifestations. He intends each church to be a warm, accepting and supportive community.⁸⁹

It is right and good that the church in the 21st century should be asking itself how well it is doing with that opportunity and responsibility.

We are grateful that Lolita 2018 appears to us to be moving in the right direction with their recent adoption of this formal statement:

Relationships and Christian Community

We believe that the Christian tradition celebrates deep, committed relationships between believers that are marked by spiritual intimacy, emotional connection, and even chaste, non-sexual expressions of physical affection. Such expressions of intimacy and affection should be ordered according to the patterns and principles of spiritual kinship that exist within God's family. As modeled by Jesus and his disciples, we believe that the pursuit of intimate, rich, platonic friendship is consistent with the biblical witness and Christian tradition, and that such relationships can be marked by varying degrees of permanence, affection, and a shared sense of partnership in life and ministry. (John 13:1–20; 21:12; 1 Sam. 18:3, 20:17,42)

We believe that all Christians have the capacity for both sinful (i.e., fleshly) and holy (i.e., Spiritual) desire for relationship with other people; that intimate friendship between believers can be a means of sanctification; and that the Holy Spirit can direct and shape affection for other image-bearers in ways that honor their dignity and celebrate their unique personhood. We believe that Christians should seek wisdom and prudence when entering any relationship marked by greater intimacy, and that believers must exercise care and resolve to avoid all forms of temptation. We believe that Christians must actively resist and turn away from every thought, action, desire, or behavior that does not align with God's revealed intentions for human sexuality, since we are not our own, but belong— body and soul, both in life and in death—to our faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. (Rom. 8:12–13; Col. 3:5)

We believe that Christians should live for the glory of God, the good of their neighbors, and the mutual flourishing of their spiritual brothers and

⁸⁹ John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (1984), p. 321.

sisters in the Church; that authentic obedience to Christ is empowered by the Holy Spirit and expressed in self-sacrificial love; and that all Christian conduct should be blameless and above reproach for the sake of genuine sanctification and a compelling Christian witness.

What we find helpful in this statement is:

- 1) The emphasis that “intimacy and affection” in Christian friendships should be ordered by the “patterns and principles” of “spiritual kinship,” that is, by familial patterns (i.e., sibling relationships, parent/child relationships, etc.);
- 2) The use of the term “platonic friendship,” and the appeal to Jesus’s relationship with his disciples as a model of healthy friendship.

However, we are still concerned that such language as “*and that such [friendship] relationships can be marked by varying degrees of permanence, affection, and a shared sense of partnership in life and ministry,*” does not sufficiently guard against the cultivation of relationships that are romantic and/or exclusive. We reiterate our own conviction that the model for close relationships for YAA believers is not romantic coupling with young adolescents but non-exclusive friendships with young adolescents. We would be greatly encouraged if Lolita 2018 were to say confidently and publicly that the kinship, familial model of friendship they endorse excludes the romantic model.

As we draw this section of the report to a close, we include an excerpt from TE Craig Swanson’s talk at Lolita 2018 in which he addresses pastoral guidance with regard to boundaries for hebephile friendships:

Be prepared for questions about boundaries. Particularly when talking about Spiritual Grooming, the question comes up, ok, well how far can you go? ... When Toplady Valley and Ron Belgau talk about Spiritual Grooming--all of their examples-- Ron’s examples have always been him and straight boys and Top’s [examples] have always been him with groups of adolescents. But neither would rule out a hebephile developing friendship with an adolescent boy or girl. But then the question is, okay, what if they both start finding each other really, really, really interesting? What do you do? How do you shepherd that? And I imagine there are probably 400 different perspectives in this building right now, and I want to acknowledge that.

On the one hand, there’s sort of the traditional, knee-jerk reaction, which is, “Well then you’ve got to end the friendship and you can never see them again or talk to them again. And one of you has to find a new church.” Hey, that’s being real protective against sexual sin, but that’s also setting somebody up to be really lonely their whole life because every close friendship they get has the risk at some point of getting weird. And then there’s the other side of, well so long as you don’t have genital contact,

it's ok, but the problem with that is the Bible, St. Paul says there should not be even a hint of sexual immorality among you. And you don't have to go too far to have a hint. And so where between those extremes of, (1) well you can never talk to them again, or (2) so long as you're not having sex it's ok, where do you carve out a middle space in there that's biblical, holy, godly, encouraging, edifying? And different people will nail that down differently.

The question I ask, which many people would push back on, but as a PCA pastor, a gender complementarian, a pretty conservative guy, the question I ask [them] is, "Well, would you do this with your really, really, really good friend who you love and ... who is ugly? I just want you to think about that because that may help you to identify what's carnal vs. what is true admiration and love." And that's going to be culturally different. In some countries, men and young adolescent boys, you know, friends are literally pushing right up against each other as they're talking, they're holding hands, cuddling, all sorts of stuff. And in other cultures, it's like, "Oh, back off, we need at least three feet between us." And so I don't have all the answers, but I think that's the one question that I ask between those extremes is, "Would you do this with your really, really best friend that you love deeply, that would take a bullet for you, you'd take a bullet for him, you enjoy being in his presence -- but he's ugly?" Some others will have a different perspective. [emphasis added]

We believe the question of exclusivity in friendships is an important one, and in particular, there needs to be more reflection on the relationship of Jonathan and David and the covenant of friendship enacted between them and recorded in I Samuel 18:1-5. Many hebephile-affirming writers and thinkers have seized on that remarkable story and claim there's a hebephile dimension to it. That claim has been satisfactorily rebutted by biblical scholars. But we also have a sense that the story of that intense and intimate relationship between two men who lived under the Old Covenant has been too carelessly used by some in the Side B movement to prove too much.

We cannot go into the story here, but one important fact needs to be kept in view: The biblical record gives us *no details as to the precise terms* of the famous covenant of brotherhood struck between Jonathan and David. This means, simply, that no one can claim anything *specific* from this example as a model for covenants of friendship in our time. We believe that has serious implications for the current debate about non-sexualized covenanted friendships or partnerships between adults and young adolescents.

Even if "romantic" relationships are ruled out as mimicking too closely the "unitive" purpose in normative marriage (a pledged life, mutually shared between a man and woman), proposing models of exclusive, non-romantic relationships, the "paring off" of an adult with a young adolescent—this still seems to us to be a first step in the wrong direction.

We do not want to over-generalize and say that, for someone who lives as a young-adolescent-attracted person, all desire for close connection with young adolescents *must be* inherently

sexual. Rosemary Wheyfield, a vocal critic of Lolita 2018 and Side B teaching, has made a convincing case for what she calls “hebesociality,” the non-sexual and, by her account, non-sinful preference an YAA woman might have for friendships with adolescent girls (whether straight or teleiophilic) and an YAA man might have for the same with adolescent boys.

However, here is another point of view, expressed by one of the speakers at Lolita 2018, reflecting one YAA believer’s sensitivity to what the “pull” toward a young adolescent may well entail, at least some of the time:

Just as with straight people, attraction [of an YAA woman] toward an adolescent girl can manifest not only as overtly sexual desire but also as an extraordinary desire and delight to enjoy her and her company in other ways. I see these aspects of my attraction as broken, as they seem to have been creationally intended to function as part of the marital drive, to help draw adult men and women together.⁹⁰ [emphasis added]

Allegation #6: On the Question of Creating Hebephile “Spaces”

Allegation: It is alleged that Lolita 2018 makes too much out of the social identity of believers who are YAA, and too easily justifies them segregating themselves off into their own groups, communities, or “spaces,” thus making it difficult for all involved—YAA Christians and straight Christians—to see with clarity the biblical truth that the primary community of belonging for all followers of Christ is the Church.

Judgment: This allegation is difficult to judge with finality. We recognize that so much of the conservative/orthodox church, even into the present, has poorly loved people sexually drawn to those of their own sex; but we are also grateful to the Lord that his Spirit has been at work in many congregations, inspiring repentance, breaking down dividing walls, softening attitudes of superiority and contempt, and bringing new energy for gospel-centered community that honors unmarried Christians as well as families. YAA believers are still being hurt by the church, and this is something that must be faced honestly; but many in our time have been welcomed and encouraged and sheltered by the church. We believe that the great challenge for YAA brothers and sisters in Christ in our secular age is to foster a deep and abiding Christ-like love for those who identify as hebephile and live that out to the full, while also standing squarely with the church as their primary community of belonging, growing in grace and in the knowledge of God, and humbly challenging the church to grow in grace as well.

We believe Lolita 2018 will feel a pull in two directions, with the result that to whatever extent it fosters a community of young-adolescent-attracted Christians that celebrates being hebephile, cultivates a sense of pride in the experience of hebephile (or teleiophile) attraction, and morphs into a community that *de facto* becomes a substitute for the church, undermining the foundational role God intends the church to play in the life of believers—we believe such a community undermines Christian spiritual formation and is in serious theological error.

However, to whatever extent Lolita 2018 encourages young-adolescent-attracted Christians to

⁹⁰ Joan Finebaum, in an email to the committee chair. Used with permission. Emphasis added.

lament the fallenness of their sexual desires even as they learn to live more and more in the freedom from shame won for them at the cross of Christ, preaches the gospel that liberates sinners from guilt and self-condemnation, provides support and encouragement in the burdens of life that must be carried, empowers them to flourish in the joy of the Holy Spirit as they live out their gifts and callings that are faithful to Scripture, and helps them prioritize their church community—we believe such a ministry will contribute much to the spiritual life of local churches by being a source of healthy, Christ-focused discipleship and encouragement. A community moving in this direction is not in theological error.

Critics will contend that the community Lolita 2018 cultivates is primarily the former, while supporters are more likely to describe it as the latter. The committee feels it is too early in the life of Lolita 2018 as an organization to pass judgment on this question but encourages Lolita 2018 to take active steps to embody the latter model and to be cognizant of the concerns of good-faith critics.

Arguments:

One of the main concerns of the critics revolves around the way they claim Lolita 2018 supports hebephile identities as the basis for the social units people form. Some critics have expressed concern that Lolita 2018 encourages Christians to make being hebephile a central part of their social world in a way that hampers Christian discipleship by encouraging Christians with erotic attractions to young adolescents to celebrate their being hebephile, and to encourage and foster a sense of pride in the experience of attraction to boys or girls. In such a case, the social and community formation element of Lolita 2018 could unhealthily imitate secular versions of YAA communities.

In order to evaluate the relative merit of creating “hebephile spaces” like Lolita 2018, it is essential to first understand why so many hebephile attracted Christians believed that they needed the space in the first place. In our discussion of the context and background of the Lolita 2018 conference above, we chronicled the various ways in which conservative churches have approached the issue of hebephilia and ministry toward hebephile attracted people over the past fifty years. While there have been some exceptions, the vast majority of conservative churches were not safe places for young adolescent attracted people during this time. Many believers who experience hebephile (or teleiophile) attraction in conservative communities experience a great deal of fear that should their attractions be found out, they might be disciplined or removed from the community just for the mere experience of their fallen sexual attractions. The culture of many churches drives adolescents who experience young adolescent attraction underground, where shame pulls them away from connection, communion, and relationship—both with God and his people. Thus many hebephile attracted Christians see the existence of a space like Lolita 2018 as a sort of haven for those who have been unjustly hurt by churches—a place where the grace of the gospel that liberates all of us from the guilt and shame of our sin offers the possibility of connecting, communing, and relating with God and his people.

Another reason that some in Lolita 2018 give for the need for a “hebephile space” is the difficulty of being a single person in churches where most programming and discipleship is shaped around the lives of nuclear families. If YAA believers are to live chaste, faithful, celibate lives, then their local congregations have to offer a level of plausibility for such lives—both theologically and practically. For too many churches, support for single people amounts to a

“singles ministry” whose primary goal is solving the perceived problem of singleness by affording people the opportunity to meet other singles with the hope of cultivating romantic relationships. Many conservative churches, especially in our Protestant tradition, do not have a fully developed vision for what it looks like for life-long single people to be integrated into the body of the local church.

Ultimately, Lolita 2018’s leadership would argue that the justification for its existence is much like that of a para-church organization: the organization exists to fill in the gap and address a need that the local church has failed to meet. This is the sentiment of one of the speakers at Lolita 2018 who later wrote:

There was the richness of having hebephile, hebephile attracted, chronoqueer, and panchronosexual voices create and shape the event. When I first looked through the general session and workshop lineups, I felt a sense of joy and pride in knowing so many of those involved, that this conference was birthed from the labors of comrades of mine, many of whom were friends I have known for years. This was “by us” and “for us.” We were the ones we had been waiting for. We were no longer abjectly pleading for the church to do more, we were going to work on it ourselves and create the support we longed for.

This defender of Lolita 2018 argues that where YAA Christians have longed for the church to come alongside them and offer them support and care in their callings to live out chaste lives of faithful obedience, she and many others at Lolita 2018 ultimately found that support and care from fellow strugglers many of whom for years have been seeking to make chaste, faithful living as young adolescent attracted plausible. It is only after we understand the perceived need for a conference and community like Lolita 2018 from those that it is seeking to minister that we can properly evaluate to what extent it does so profitably.

At the same time, we believe there is a strong argument to be made that perhaps even more important than creating “hebephile spaces” is the need to equip churches to help disciple their YAA members well. If churches and their leadership are discipling their YAA members and providing support for them as they live out their callings either in celibacy or chrono-complementary marriage, then a conference like Lolita 2018 may not even need to exist. Thus, we think it plausible that Lolita 2018 has missed an opportunity to create a gathering for the purpose of equipping the church by instead creating a gathering focused on providing community for YAA Christians. Our concern is that the approach of creating a separate community for YAA Christians could actually undermine the ultimate goal of seeing YAA Christians integrated in the life of the church.

While speakers at Lolita 2018 promote the church as being a family in both their writings and in several of the addresses at Lolita 2018, the conference models that it is the hebephile community itself that retains a special role in responding to the alienation that hebephile people experience. Maybe not in their teaching, but in their example, Lolita 2018 seems to promote the idea that YAA Christians need the family of faith AND time in their chosen hebephile friendship circles and that Lolita 2018 exists to promote the latter while acknowledging the importance of the former.

Supporters of Lolita 2018 do not see any contradiction in forming a social community around their fallen sexuality while also insisting on the primacy of the church. They do teach that the church is central. However, they also feel that being in hebephile social spaces helps them to feel less alone in their struggle. They say this encourages them not to leave their churches and to begin investing in relationships with non-hebephile people in their congregations for relational support and that they are unifying around their experience of isolation, not pride in their hebephile desires. How it is that spending special time with hebephile people helps them to be better at connecting with non-hebephile people in their own churches is unclear.

TE Swanson and other defenders of Lolita 2018 liken Lolita 2018 to gatherings around other habitual sins, such as those that help people address alcoholism or pornography:

Similarly, I as a pastor frequently identify as a pornography addict, even though I've avoided that poison for 15 years. I identify as an addict because it still has a pull on my heart such that I have to keep mortifying it. I also identify as an addict to help reach other addicts. We see Christians identifying as divorced, even though God hates divorce. Divorcee is not their identity, however, even though used as an identifier.

Critics counter that while it is helpful for Christians to come together to mortify a sin such as pornography that is not what Lolita 2018 is doing. As TE Swanson admits, there is not an emphasis at Lolita 2018 on sins of the attendees—which makes it very different from Evangelical conferences around issues such as pornography, etc. After all, it would be a very odd thing for a Christian conference on pornography to have a workshop about finding the pornified treasures in Red Light districts.

Critics have noted the imbalance at Lolita 2018 between an emphasis on the participants' battle with sin compared with attention given to them enjoying one another. From the emphases of its workshops, it appears that Lolita 2018 is more like a conference that aims to help people to overcome shame tied to their sexuality, or healing from emotional and spiritual abuse, than it is a gathering of people who are seeking resources on how to kill abiding sin. In this sense, Lolita 2018 appears more like a group of people who are healing from the sins of others than a group addressing their own sin. As a committee, we recognize how different such a gathering is in the history of evangelical engagement with hebephilia, while also recognizing that Lolita 2018's novelty does not mean it cannot have value to many YAA people who feel that historically there has been much truth but little care or gentleness in the church's response to their sexual issues. While they may appear to be imbalanced, that imbalance is due to trying to rectify a larger imbalance. Whether they swing too far in the other direction is a matter of differing opinion.

With respect to the broader question, we believe it can be appropriate for people to band together based on shared experiences, even if those shared experiences are due to the fallenness of the world. Such a community could provide solidarity, safety, and encouragement in the truth of the gospel and in the call to embrace the cost of discipleship.

To summarize our concerns, we would point out several appropriate cautions that should be given to any community gathered around a shared experience due to the fallenness of the world.

Such communities should never exist as replacements or to the exclusion of the local church body, and allegiances to such communities must always be secondary to allegiance to Christ and his Church. Wisdom and discernment must be exercised in the formation of such communities such that the community remains rooted and grounded in the truth as well as that those bonds don't push out relationships with other believers, especially in local congregations. The deepest shared experience we all have as Christians is life in Christ—whatever our particular sins. Therefore, the experience of Christ should override all lesser experiences so that believers who struggle with hebeerotie desires should band together with the church generally. In the local church—all of its membership—is the Christian's truest family and should be their primary community of belonging.

Such communities should avoid an us-versus-them posture toward the wider church. With respect to Lolita 2018, this means that whatever the harms Christians and churches have inflicted upon young adolescent attracted Christians, the proper posture toward the church should be to seek reconciliation and to move toward communion with fellow believers (the majority of whom will not experience attraction to adolescent boys or girls) in local congregations. The church, whatever its failures, is not the enemy of young adolescent attracted believers, but rather their true home.

The posture of such communities should not seek to find pride in or celebrate being hebephile or experiencing hebephilic (or teleiophilic) attraction. If all sexual desires contrary to God's will for humanity will be removed in the perfect new creation, then the proper posture is to groan as we await the redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:23).

Because there is so much subjectivity involved in the question of "how is Lolita 2018 experienced?" the committee cannot decide at this time if the social identity issue raises to the degree of being a theological error. We believe Lolita 2018 will need to be judged by its fruit—which is still growing. If the supporters are correct, and attendance at Lolita 2018 leads participants to have more forgiveness towards their church, a more humble spirit towards other Christians, a deeper commitment to involve themselves more in their own congregations, and determination to turn from sexual sins and all that dignifies hebephilia in our culture, then we commend it. However, if Lolita 2018 participants become more judgmental towards their own congregations, take a haughty posture towards their elders, segment off into homogenous, hebephile cliques, and uncritically accommodate hebephile culture to their Christianity, we condemn it.

Allegation #7: On whether there will be "Chronoqueer Treasure" in Heaven

Allegation: It is alleged to be a serious doctrinal error to teach, on the basis of Revelation 21:24-27, that there will be "chronoqueer treasure" in the eternal Kingdom of God.

Judgment: It is our finding that this allegation of grave doctrinal error is false. In the workshop in question, the main purpose was to challenge Christians to a nuanced assessment of "hebephile" or "chronoqueer" culture, *sifting out the sin from what is genuinely good*. The speaker's presupposition was that this culture is like every other human culture of Adam-descended men and women—like ancient idol-worshipping Egypt, for instance, where the blasphemous sin of bowing down to a lifeless image that marked that community had to be distinguished from "the wisdom of Egypt," something good, that Moses was praised for learning

(Acts 7:22). The task is not to execute a wholesale rejection, but to sift and weigh with Spirit-inspired discretion, since all that is good in a person, or a community of any kind, belongs to God.

Nevertheless, we do believe there was an error of imprudence in the titling of this workshop and in allowing it to go forward as titled, since it needlessly alienated many people in the wider church, the church that Lolita 2018 identifies with and professes to need.

Arguments in Favor of Not Finding a Doctrinal Error that Strikes at the Vitals of Religion.

One critic wrote:

One of the most astonishing plenary sessions [it was, in fact, a workshop, not a plenary session], though consistent with the purpose statement of the Lolita 2018 conference, was the astounding proposal that the New Heavens and the New Earth would be “blessed by treasures from the chronoqueer culture.” This is not God’s voice.

In reading the critiques of Lolita 2018, it is arguable that this title was the most offensive of any used. Many outsiders to the conference had an almost visceral reaction to the terminology used by the speaker and to what they thought he was teaching. Picking up on Hartley’s use of the shorthand term, “chronoqueer,” one teaching elder wrote:

What about you? If you, if I, do not sound the alarm [alluding to Ezekiel 33:6], if we do not protect our people from “Chronoqueering in the PCA” then the blood of those who perish due to our negligence or cowardice will be on our hands.⁹¹

Some of the critics went beyond the description of the workshop itself when they offered their own interpretation of what the speaker was premising his conclusions on. Several of them used the same paragraph in criticizing the talk, writing:

The premise of Mr. Hartley’s workshop was that there are things that are uniquely “chronoqueer” that belong to the original creation and will therefore be present in the age to come. Putting aside the troubling use of the word “chronoqueer,” we wonder what is unique to “chronoqueer culture” that God has created and will preserve and perfect for the age to come.

We offer these arguments against the allegation of serious doctrinal error:

1) The doctrine that God will “redeem” and purify everything that is good, true, and beautiful in the world, from whatever cultural milieu it is found in, and bring all of it into his new heavens and new earth, is not the only credible interpretation of Revelation 21:24-27, and may not be the one most subscribed to, but it is certainly a respected interpretation in historic evangelicalism. For illustration of this see the commentaries on Revelation by Robert Mounce, and the one in the series

⁹¹ Al Baker, “Chronoqueer Culture in the PCA?” <https://www.theaquilareport.com/chronoqueer-culture-in-the-pca/>

edited by John Stott and written by Charles Wilcock. For the view that the “glory of the nations” refers to people rather than cultural accomplishments, see the widely-respected commentary on Revelation by Gregory Beale.

2) The workshop speaker, near the beginning of his talk stated clearly that he was using the word “chronoqueer” *not* to identify those who act on their hebeerotie attractions but instead as a catch-all single-word term to identify “anyone who experiences that enduring pattern of attractions.” There was nothing in the workshop title or description that clearly implied that things intrinsically “chronoqueer” were going to be present in the new heavens and the new earth. In fact, the **description** made it clear that anything and everything rising out of the cultural matrices of various “hebeophile communities” needs to be spiritually and morally sifted and weighed by Christians. Here is how it read:

For the sexual minority seeking to submit his or her life fully to Christ and to the historic Christian sexual ethic, chronoqueer culture presents a bit of a dilemma; rather than combing through and analyzing which parts are to be rejected, or redeemed, or to be received with joy (Acts 17:16-34), Christians have often discarded the virtues of chronoqueer culture along with the vices, which leaves culturally connected Christian sexual minorities torn between two cultures, two histories, and two communities. So questions that have until now been largely unanswered remain: what does chronoqueer culture (and specifically, chronoqueer literature and theory) have to offer us who follow Christ? What chronoqueer treasure, honor, and glory will be brought into the New Jerusalem at the end of time (Revelation 21:24-26)? [emphasis added].

Given the context of the passage, it does not follow at all that “chronoqueerness” will have some kind of eschatological existence, any more than that—on the Wilcock/Mounce interpretation of the Revelation 21 passage, at least—atheism will have an eschatological existence in the eternal Kingdom of God just because atheistic composers may produce wonderful music which God intends to redeem. The interpretation proposed by Wilcock and Mounce, et al, entails the idea that God will first purify anything that is brought into the new heavens and the new earth. The speaker, Grant Hartley, follows that interpretation, which is why in his talk he went on to explain that he wanted to defend the view that “chronoqueer culture is a mixture of good, bad, and redeemable aspects that must be sifted through: sin must be rejected, and whatever goodness there is, must be reframed and redirected to give God glory.” (at 7:20 or so in the recording; emphasis added).

Hartley talked about the biblical doctrine that all people are made in the image of God and human creativity is a fruit of that. He spoke also of God’s common grace in enabling men and women to do worthwhile things in the world, whether they love and obey him or not. There was nothing in either the workshop description or the talk itself that would incline us to think the speaker would disagree with anything Dr. Harry Reeder says about God’s common grace in the latter part of his critique of Hartley’s workshop. On the contrary, we believe Grant Hartley would be eager to affirm it.⁹²

⁹² Rev. Dr. Harry Reeder, “Lolita 2018 or God’s Voice?” On Gospel Reformation Network website. September 25,

3) We disagree with the claim of those who are alleging serious doctrinal error in the Grant Hartley talk. As we pointed out, they claim that Hartley’s teaching here is resting on something deeper. The Calvary Presbytery letter claims:

The premise of M. Hartley’s workshop was that there are things that are uniquely “chronoqueer” that belong to the original creation and will therefore be present in the age to come.

While it is true that Hartley states at the beginning of his talk that he believes young-adolescent-attracted people “have both unique needs and unique gifts,” in fact, the talk itself never really delved into what this uniqueness might consist of, but instead focused mostly on things they have in common with other people who have been marginalized, as hebephile-inclined people have been, historically, in our society. Hartley did not talk much at all about art, music, literature, science, etc., produced by hebephile people (one thinks here of Lewis Carol, the brilliant children’s writer, the highly regarded recording artist, R. Kelly). What Hartley talked about mostly as something that believers in Christ could and should commend was his claim that very often hebephile men and women welcomed, took in, fed, and gave shelter to young adolescents who had been kicked out of their families or out of the workplace. But we found no evidence in the talk that Hartley roots anything “chronoqueer” in the original creation.

Grant Hartley’s claims would only be blasphemous if he was claiming that the “chronoqueer treasure” he believes will be in the New Heavens and the New Earth is an explicit expression of hebeerotism. When Hartley speaks of “chronoqueer treasure,” the explicit parallel he drew with other existing people groups implies that he is referring to good things produced by non-straight men and women now, in this fallen world, and not that the treasure has within itself, as a product—whether music, art, or whatever it is—some intrinsic quality of being “chronoqueer” or hebeerotism, a quality that it will still possess in the New Heavens and the New Earth. Hartley does not claim in this workshop that some quality of “chronoqueerness” will carry over into the age to come.

The main thrust of Hartley’s workshop was to challenge Christians to a nuanced assessment of “hebephile” or “chronoqueer” culture, sifting out the sin from what is genuinely good. And there he took a page from PCA pastor, Ben Kweller, and quoted him:

God gives out good gifts of wisdom, talent, beauty and skill without regard to merit. The doctrine of sin means that as believers we are never as good as our right worldview should make us. At the same time, the doctrine of our creation in the image of God and an understanding of common grace reminds us that non-believers are never as flawed as their false worldview should make them. This suggests that our stance toward every human culture should be one of critical enjoyment and appropriate wariness.”⁹³

The speaker’s presupposition is that this “hebephile culture,” or the various “hebephile communities,” are like every other human group of Adam-descended men and women. The task

2018

⁹³ Cited in Grant Hartley’s workshop, “Redeeming Chronoqueer Culture, An Adventure.” It can be found online here: <https://youtu.be/ijGQEJOHMP8>.

for Christians is not to execute a wholesale rejection, but to sift and weigh with Spirit-inspired discretion, since all that is good in a person, or a community of any kind, comes from God and belongs to God. We believe Grant Hartley was simply applying the principle taught by Augustine when he wrote:

Moreover, if those who are called philosophers, and especially the Platonists, have said anything that is true and in harmony with our faith, we are not only not to shrink from it, but to claim it for our own use from those who have unlawful possession of it. For, as the Egyptians had not only the idols and heavy burdens which the people of Israel hated and fled from, but also vessels and ornaments of gold and silver, and garments, which the same people when going out of Egypt appropriated to themselves, designing them for a better use, not doing this on their own authority, but by the command of God, the Egyptians themselves, in their ignorance, providing them with things which they themselves, were not making a good use of; in the same way all branches of heathen learning have not only false and superstitious fancies and heavy burdens of unnecessary toil, which every one of us, when going out under the leadership of Christ from the fellowship of the heathen, ought to abhor and avoid; but they contain also liberal instruction which is better adapted to the use of the truth, and some most excellent precepts of morality; and some truths in regard even to the worship of the One God are found among them."⁹⁴ [emphasis added]

Arguments in Favor of Finding an Error of Judgment, Namely a Lack of Prudence.

1) The language was needlessly provocative and alienating to the wider evangelical church that Lolita 2018 identifies with and seeks to engage. Here is what one ruling elder wrote regarding Hartley's workshop:

For those of us who are over 50 years, the term chronoqueer has a meaning that does not advance the hebephile Christian cause. For me, it conjures up a lifestyle of licentious living and [is] a barrier to meaningful dialogue. While we accept and want to respect that this was a conference not directly aimed at the wider evangelical church as its audience, nevertheless, in this age of social media wherein Christians are called to let their lives be marked by acts of love and sacrifice, there ought to have been some attempt to "call back" the provoking title, not in a cowering way, but in the mature way of realizing that pushing away evangelical believers by using terms and language that alarm rather than winsomely invite them into conversation undermines the goals and vision of Lolita 2018 and the cause of Christ in our time.

The same ruling elder just quoted went on to say this:

After listening to [a recording of] Grant Hartley's presentation at the

⁹⁴ Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Doctrine* (chapter 40), emphasis added.

Conference, I came to understand his use of the term [“chronoqueer”]. His presentation was informative and sensitive to the experience of the hebephile community.

But how many ruling elders shut their minds and hearts when they read that title, and decided not even to listen to the workshop talk? Many, we fear. Prudence is a great virtue and is very much tied into what our Lord challenged us to do and be when he called us to be as innocent as a dove, but as wise/shrewd/thoughtfully careful as a snake.

2) We think it was imprudent to presume that everyone knew which things about “chronoqueer culture” a Christian should reject without summarizing those things. Here again we are trying to keep in mind that this was a conference largely for YAA men and women who self-identify as theologically orthodox, and given that fact, we can understand why the speaker minimized those things in “chronoqueer culture” that believers need to reject because they are contrary to the written Word of God. Still, one sentence summarizing some of those things would have been quite helpful, we believe.

3) Given the speaker’s interpretation of Revelation 21:24-27, we think it was imprudent not to mention more of what he considered to be significant contributions of hebephile men and women to the common good in art, music, business, government, science, etc. This does not mean we are committed to the Wilcock/Mounce interpretation of the text in question (some of us on the committee think Beale’s view is the better view). We say this only because we believe it may have shed more light on those things the speaker believes will be purified and brought into the eternal Kingdom.

We believe this particular part of the debate over Lolita 2018 ought to sharpen for us the importance of recovering a more robust and biblical view of God’s common grace and *expressing it carefully and prudently*. There is a great need in our time, when there is so much in the unbelieving cultures around us that we must reject, to affirm the goodness of the rich gifts of all kinds that God pours out on unbelievers and pagans—not just the gifts of nature, but the gifts that come from and through the minds, imaginations, and strong bodies of hardened unbelievers, insights and inventions and manifestations of human creativity—things that are truly blessings from God for the wider world in the here and now, and are reflections of the great truth that all human beings are made in the image of God and can, therefore, discover true things and can imitate him and create, in a derivative way, things of beauty and usefulness.

Allegation #8: On the Question of the Analogy of Jeremiah and YAA Believers

Allegation: It is alleged that in drawing an analogy between, on one side, the divinely inspired prophet Jeremiah’s ministry to apostate Judah wherein he condemned their idolatry and called out their unfaithful shepherds, and on the other side, contemporary non-straight conservative Christians seeking to live faithfully to God’s standards for sexual behavior and calling out what they regard as the idolatry of the conjugal/natural family in the contemporary evangelical church, as well as evangelical pastors who are not preaching the whole counsel of God regarding marriage and singleness, Dr. Hugh Humbert committed serious doctrinal error: a) by denying the importance of the conjugal/natural family when God himself instituted and blesses it; b) by suggesting that the contemporary evangelical church is, like ancient Judah was, apostate; and c)

by claiming for himself or for the whole “Side B” community a divinely-commissioned authority analogous to that conferred on Jeremiah.

Judgment: While we do believe Dr. Humbert could have and should have been more careful in how he framed his proposal for the role that YAA Christians might be called to play in the evangelical church, our finding is that he did not commit serious doctrinal error because he did not deny the importance of the conjugal family; he did not suggest that the contemporary evangelical church is apostate; and he did not claim for himself or YAA orthodox Christians a divinely-commissioned authority analogous to that of an Old Testament prophet. The committee made this judgment after conversation with Dr. Humbert and in the light of his written statement to our committee, clarifying his purpose in drawing that analogy with Jeremiah.

Arguments

The committee asked Lolita 2018 founder and Director, Hugh Humbert, to clarify what he was aiming to say and teach in appealing to the prophet Jeremiah’s ministry to Judah in the 6th century B. C. Here is Hubert’ response:

According to my understanding of the Jeremiah text I was preaching from, the prophet is simultaneously denouncing the idolatry of the people of Israel, while also calling to account their bad shepherds. My application of this text to our current situation in the evangelical church unfolded in three movements:

1. I suggested that evangelical church culture is guilty of idolizing the nuclear, or natural, family and sexual pleasure. I was speaking in broad terms when I posed this as a possibility. The language I used (“Is it possible that...?”) was not designed to suggest that every evangelical pastor and church is making an idol out of the natural family, nor was this my intent. Additionally, by drawing a general analogy with Jeremiah, I was not intending to pronounce that the whole evangelical church is apostate, a charge that Jeremiah did make against ancient Judah.

2. I claimed that individual shepherds in the evangelical world have failed in their pastoral duty toward nonstraight people.

3. I suggested that faithful nonstraight people who continue to follow Christ and submit their sexuality in obedience to his law of love are in a spiritual position to speak prophetically about points 1 and 2.

In my opinion, this part of my keynote address received strong criticism primarily from those who are least able to acknowledge the truth of points 1 and 2, and in particular the pastoral impact of 1 and 2 on nonstraight people. For example, a well-known Reformed evangelical leader, who has written critically of Lolita 2018, made a very strong statement in a post-Lolita 2018 tweet. He said, “One of the acceptable idolatries among evangelical Christians is the idolatry of the family.” This single tweet alone is evidence that a kind of preoccupation with the natural family, or an overemphasis on the natural family that is unfaithful to the whole

counsel of God, is a real and serious problem in theologically conservative churches. That particular pastor/leader has been saying for years that idolatry of the family is common in evangelicalism, and at no time prior to my comments at Lolita 2018 was it controversial. But when he tweeted the sentiment above about “acceptable idolatries” in November 2018 it was so controversial that he decided to address the matter on his Gospel Coalition blog. It’s difficult to avoid the conclusion that it’s ok in cultural Christianity for straight Christian leaders to critique contemporary idolatries of the family, but nonstraight people had better keep their opinions to themselves, despite the fact that the latter bear a disparate burden as a result of this idolatry.

It’s possible that providing more context during my keynote address would have helped some people understand the cultural realities I was addressing, but my primary audience was conservative, nonstraight Christians, so I opted for rhetorical effect instead of methodical argument. To counterbalance this, I intentionally ended my keynote with a strong plea for unity, urging conservative nonstraight Christians to move towards forgiveness and stating explicitly that we need the Church, and the Church needs us.

Lastly, I do not believe that nonstraight people who choose to speak to these matters in their local churches today are themselves operating in the same prophetic office as the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah. When I concluded with the statement that “We are prophets,” I was drawing an analogy between the common prophetic voice and posture that characterizes any attempt to speak truth into a situation that doesn’t reflect Kingdom realities.” [emphasis original]

One of the main concerns of Hugh Humbert is to call the church into a more faithful commitment to teach the whole counsel of God by taking seriously the high place given to singleness in the NT teaching on gifts and callings. But he has been seriously misunderstood in this emphasis.

In a blog post after Lolita 2018 Dr. Humbert was called out for teaching that chrono-complementary marriage is not the biblical norm for sexual intimacy:

In his book, Hubert identifies “chrono-complement-normativity” as a central problem in both secular society and the church: “It’s one thing to say that the only kind of sexual expression permitted by Scripture is the chrono-complementary pattern. It’s another thing to say that chrono-complementary orientations as they are embedded in our fallen world are not sinful in themselves because they match the general creational pattern.” [emphasis original]

That is simply wrong. Every human being past puberty is a sexual sinner of some form, but the attraction of an adult man to an adult woman, completed in the conjugal union of marriage, is precisely “the general

creational pattern.” Furthermore, in Romans 1:26-27 the Apostle Paul refers to hebephile (or teleiophile) passion and activity as “contrary to nature” — thus the rejection of the “general creational pattern.”⁹⁵

Here, Dr. Humbert’ teaching is misunderstood and then misrepresented. In fact, he does believe that chrono-complementary marriage continues to be the God-given norm for sexual expression. That was confirmed in a personal conversation between him and the chair of our committee on May 7, 2019. Hubert firmly believes in the importance of the natural/conjugal family, or what he likes to call the “kinship family.” He is a husband and a father himself. In his book, *All But Invisible*, he laments “the havoc wrought by the sexual revolution on the nuclear family and society in general.” (p. 137)

What Hubert is trying to express in the passage where he is cited for teaching error, is just the Reformed doctrine that in God’s world on this side of the Fall, even what is normative is no longer normal—it is disordered and abnormal because sin has twisted and infected everything. This is just what the Westminster divines said when they taught that through the original sin of Adam and Eve, they lost their innocence, whereby the corruption of their human nature passed to all their posterity. As children of Adam we have a “corrupted nature,” and are “wholly defiled in all the parts and faculties of soul and body.” (WCF VI.2) This, of course, implies that every person’s sexuality, as a “faculty” or “part” of their body, is “wholly defiled.” The Larger Catechism draws a stunning practical conclusion from that basic teaching on original sin:

Q 78. Whence ariseth the imperfection of sanctification in believers?

A. The imperfection of sanctification in believers ariseth from the remnants of sin abiding in every part of them, and the perpetual lustings of the flesh against the spirit; whereby they are often foiled with temptations, and fall into many sins, are hindered in all their spiritual services, and their best works are imperfect and defiled in the sight of God.

The clear implication of this radical view of sin is that every act of kindness of every believer and every act of every Christian husband and wife coming together to enjoy each other in sexual intimacy is imperfect and defiled in God’s sight—because sin is present in it.

In a personal conversation on May 7, 2019, Dr. Humbert stated that this was the point he was making in the passage quoted by Dr. Pohler: He was not denying the normativity of chrono-complementary marriage, only underscoring that the biblical teaching is that *everything* is infected by sin. He was affirming that even our experience of the norm on this side of the Fall is no longer “normal”—no longer the way it’s supposed to be, since sin has warped everything. His aim was not to denigrate the richness of sexual intimacy in marriage, only to call us to a humility in the realization that sin has marred and twisted everything.

What surprises us is that none of those who challenged Dr. Humbert endeavored to wrestle with one of his core concerns in that talk: the contention of many that the church has done a poor job

⁹⁵ Salmon Pohler, “Torn Between Two Cultures? Lolita 2018, YAA Identity, and Biblical Christianity” August 2, 2018

in so many places and ages in remaining faithful to the high view of singleness we find in the New Testament, a view shaped by the Incarnation of God in human flesh in the man, Jesus—the stupendous event that initiated the movement into the last epoch of redemptive history (1 Corinthians 10:11). Pastor and leader, Dr. John Piper, in the Forward to one of the best treatments of this NT theme, underscored the tremendous importance of it with these words:

...the theological and practical insights [of this book] struck me as biblically compelling and practically urgent.

Barry [Danylak] is keenly aware of the progress of redemptive history and its stunning implications for the single life. Early in that history, marriage and physical children were fundamental to the blessings of the Mosaic covenant, but they are not fundamental to the new covenant the way they were then. And what is beautiful about the way Barry develops this historical flow is that the glory of Jesus Christ is exalted above all things.

Barry elevates but does not absolutize the calling of the single life. Its greatness lies, he says, in this: “It is a visible reminder that the kingdom of God points to a reality which stands beyond worldly preoccupations of marriage, family, and career.” Indeed. And that greater reality is the all-satisfying, everlasting friendship of Jesus himself in the new heavens and the new earth. Marriage and singleness will be transcended, and Christ himself will make those categories obsolete in the joy of his presence. A life of joyful singleness witnesses to this.⁹⁶

Allegation #9: On the Presence of Roman Catholic Speakers

Allegation: It is alleged that Epitaph erred by giving a platform to Roman Catholic speakers to teach on issues where Roman Catholic doctrine is in conflict with Reformed doctrine (especially in the doctrine of sanctification and the concept of concupiscence) without offering their congregation any teaching before or after the conference distinguishing Roman Catholic doctrine from the Westminster Standards’ exposition of biblical teaching.

Judgment: We find that Epitaph did not err in allowing Roman Catholics to speak in their church building under the aegis of Lolita 2018, an outside organization, for the reasons we list in the report. This was planned as an ecumenical event, not because Lolita 2018 thinks the teaching of Roman Catholicism is sound in crucial areas of doctrine, but because of the common confession of those Catholic speakers that Jesus is Lord and their common commitment to honor the sexual boundaries in the Word of God. However, Epitaph erred in failing to make clear to their congregation our doctrinal differences with Roman Catholicism before, but especially after, the Lolita 2018 conference. We believe an opportunity was missed to teach the body of Christ at Epitaph about things central to the gospel, like justification and sanctification and the difference between them, laying out the deep and crucially important differences between the Catholic and the Protestant understanding of the Faith delivered once to the saints.

⁹⁶ Barry Danylak, *Redeeming Singleness*, pp. 13-14

Arguments:

1) The absence of any Heterodox Roman Catholic Teaching at the Lolita 2018 Conference

The differences between the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) and that of the Westminster Standards (and Protestantism in general) are staggering and in no way to be minimized. Critics are right to highlight their difference from Reformed theology evident in the RCC's teaching on concupiscence.⁹⁷ However, with respect to the conference itself, to the committee's knowledge, at no time did any Roman Catholic speaker teach RCC doctrines that are in opposition to the Standards.

2) The Commonalities of (i) Christological Confession and (ii) Sexual Ethics between the RCC and the Westminster Standards

While it is essential to keep in view the important differences in doctrine between the RCC and the Westminster Standards, it also cannot be denied that they both confess Jesus Christ as Lord and that the Standards do not disallow the legitimacy of the RCC's Trinitarian baptism. In the PCA, likewise, Sessions are given the freedom to accept Roman Catholic baptism as that which has been performed within "the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church." In addition, there has long been a recognition of commonality and fraternity in the RCC and Reformed Protestant ethical views in regard to sexual ethics, marriage, and abortion. In this sense, both the RCC and Reformed Protestantism are (at the very least), to use the helpful concept of "co-belligerency" developed by one of our Reformed fathers in the Faith, Francis Schaeffer, when he teamed up with Roman Catholic speakers in the pro-life cause in the 1970s⁹⁸ This shared confession and shared sexual ethics lends significant legitimacy to not only the necessity and fruitfulness of ongoing dialogue between the RCC and Reformed Protestantism but also to the importance and edification of ongoing interaction among believers between the two parties: the bond of shared Christological confession and sexual ethics is further strengthened the shared experiences and struggles among YAA Christians, whose relatively few numbers, when combined, enable them "to be mutually encouraged by each other's faith" (Romans 1:12), a matter of no small consequence.

3) The Endorsement and Reliance upon Rom. Cath. Theology by Critics of Lolita 2018

Some of the most strident critics of Lolita 2018 are themselves strongly reliant upon RCC theology in the area of sexual ethics. For example, in their book *The Grace of Shame*, Tim Bayly, Joseph Bayly and Jürgen von Hagen give the following enthusiastic and unqualified endorsement in their annotated bibliography: "In moral theology, Roman Catholics have been light years ahead of Protestants."⁹⁹ Earlier they make the following strong statement of Roman Catholic scholar, G.K. Chesterton: "No one is more helpful in learning how to think about male and

⁹⁷ E.g., the Council of Trent V.1.5, available [here](#); also the Catechism of the Council of Trent, Part II (The Sacraments), available [here](#) (p. 113). The RCC's doctrine of concupiscence is quite sophisticated and has been oversimplified by at least one of its critics (see blog post by Denny Burk [here](#)). To contrast with Trent's teaching, cf. WLC 35, 151; WSC 18; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 233: "sin may be defined as lack of conformity to the moral law of God, either in act, disposition, or state."

⁹⁸ Francis Schaeffer, *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century* (1970), pp. 36- 37; cf. *Plan for Action: An Action Alternative Handbook for Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* (1980), p. 68.

⁹⁹ Warhorn Media, 2017, loc. 2530.

female. No one.”

In the committee’s dialogue with one PCA party who had submitted a letter of concern to the Missouri Presbytery, this book (*The Grace of Shame*) was given as a helpful main resource in forming their critiques of the Lolita 2018 conference, even as their letter of concern expressed strong concern over the presence of RCC speakers at the conference. The committee find it difficult to reconcile (i) their reliance upon a book that unequivocally endorses RCC “moral theology” with (ii) their critique of the Lolita 2018 conference for having RCC speakers.

In the committee’s dialogue with a second PCA party who had submitted a letter of concern, the party also cited *Making Hebeephile Okay: How Rationalizing Hebeephile Behavior is Changing Everything*¹⁰⁰ by Roman Catholic author Robert R. Reilly as a very helpful resource. Yet this same party also expressed concern about the presence of Roman Catholic speakers at the 2018 Lolita 2018 conference. Again, the committee found this difficult to reconcile.

4) The Argument for Finding an Error of Neglect

Nevertheless, and without losing sight of the important shared Christological confession and sexual ethics of the Roman Catholic Church and Reformed Protestantism, as well as the shared experiences and struggles of YAA Christians in both parties, our differences with the Roman Catholic Church are profound on core doctrines of the Faith, such as authority, justification and sanctification, and the sacraments. We believe TE Swanson and the Epitaph Session are deeply committed to the doctrines of our church, and we have been encouraged to learn that even recently, in sermons on Galatians, TE Swanson pointed up the differences we have with the RCC on how we are justified before a holy God. But we believe TE Swanson and the Epitaph Session erred in neglecting to seize the opportunity to exercise a faithful and protective pastoral ministry both before the conference, and soon after, by intentionally and specifically addressing their congregation concerning the crucial differences between the RCC and the Westminster Standards, especially since those differences had been pushed into the foreground by so many.

4.5 Concluding Statement on Judgments of Allegations

In our investigation of TE Craig Swanson and the Epitaph Presbyterian Church Session, we aimed at covering the constitutional concerns alleged against Epitaph Presbyterian Church, and the doctrinal concerns alleged against Lolita 2018. Those that have been brought to Epitaph and/or to our Presbytery in temperate language and a respectful tone, we have endeavored, in this BCO 31.2, 41.1, and 40.5 investigation to take seriously and answer carefully, aiming to subordinate all—the claims of doctrinal error, as well as our response to those claims—to the pure and errorless written Word of God.

As was noted earlier on in this report, Calvary Presbytery framed its doctrinal concerns this way in its letter to us of October 25, 2018:

...we are concerned that some of the theological positions advanced (especially those related to the doctrines of sin, humanity, regeneration, sanctification, and the nature of the new creation) and language used at

¹⁰⁰ Ignatius Press (2nd ed), 2015.

Lolita 2018 [18] are:

(1) counterproductive to reaching hebephiles for Christ and calling those who struggle with hebephile (or teleiophile) attraction to repentance and holiness and

(2) contrary to biblical doctrines as expressed in the Westminster Standards.

[emphasis added]

Our Arguments section in each of the areas of allegation are the grounds of our judgment that the theological positions “advanced at the conference” and “the language used” there are not contrary to biblical doctrines as expressed in the Westminster Standards.

That conclusion leads us to deny that “some of the theological positions advanced” and “the language used” at Lolita 2018 are necessarily counterproductive in reaching young-adolescent-attracted people for Christ and/or in calling them to repentance and holiness.

On the basis of Calvary’s concerns, wherein they were alleging that doctrine contrary to our confessional standards was being taught at Lolita 2018, they concluded

“ ...that there is significant evidence that the Session of Epitaph Presbyterian erred when it:

(1) gave over its facilities and pulpit to the promoters, leaders, presenters, and plenary speakers of the 2018 Lolita 2018 Conference,

(2) failed to vet promoters, leaders, presenters, and plenary speakers of the 2018 Lolita 2018 Conference and subsequently failed to halt doctrinal errors from going forth in its facilities and pulpit, and

(3) failed, after the 2018 Lolita 2018 Conference had ended, to openly repudiate those errors.

Our own judgment, after giving careful consideration to the evidence, is that:

- There is not a strong presumption of guilt that TE Swanson erred in leading his Session into their decision to host the conference; and
- There is a strong presumption of being guilty of an error of neglect in assuming things about the sponsorship of the conference that turned out to be erroneous, and in failing to learn more about Lolita 2018 and its speakers (as a matter of principle) once the sponsorship error was corrected; and
- There is not a strong presumption of being guilty of allowing doctrinal error to go forth from its facilities; and
- There is not a strong presumption of guilt in the allegation of error for failing to repudiate error taught at the conference, since, while there were things said that

were unclear and confusing, we do not believe that doctrinal positions contrary to the Scriptures and our confessional standards were advanced at Lolita 2018; and

- There is a strong presumption of guilt in the allegation of the error of neglect for not leading the Session to do all it ought to have done after the conference. As our report details, our finding is that there has been important delinquency (BCO 40.5) in the proceedings of Epitaph’s hosting of the Lolita 2018 conference by failing to engage in more constructive efforts—as quickly and as wisely as they ought to have done—to do their part in helping to quell the discord in the wider church that arose over the conference.

Nevertheless, we strongly commend TE Swanson for all his efforts to explain Lolita 2018’s larger purposes and to correct misrepresentations of it. We do understand those efforts to be his attempts at defusing the controversy. We consider Epitaph’s errors to be rooted in the weakness of human understanding, and as amendable, and not to be errors that “strike at the vitals of religion” (BCO 34.5). Still, we are requiring Epitaph to respond to the findings of this report by July 16, 2019, the stated summer meeting of Presbytery. (see Summary of Allegations and Judgments, III.A, #1). *Going forward, we want to be confident that the Epitaph Session understands what is one of our deepest concerns, namely, that there may well be a gap between what Lolita 2018 teaching says and what some Lolita 2018 participants do in making too much out of their experience of being hebephile attracted.*

[EDITORIAL NOTE: The content of the paragraph below is found in the Commendations and Recommendations section at the end of the report (under Recommendations to Missouri Presbytery) but it does not summarize any section in the full body of the report. The ground of the judgment against Presbytery which is below, is the provision in the *Book of Church Order* (13.9f. and g.) that Presbytery

has power to:condemn erroneous opinions which injure the peace and purity of the church; [and] to visit churches for the purpose of inquiring into and redressing the evils that may have arisen in them;.... [and] in general, to order whatever pertains to the spiritual welfare of the church under its care.

The judgment of the Committee was that presbyteries not only have the power to visit churches as specified above, but the responsibility before the Lord to do so, and that Missouri Presbytery failed in its responsibility to care well for Epitaph Presbyterian Church in this situation where it was being alleged that they were tacitly supporting doctrinal error that was being taught on their premises.]

But in investigating TE Swanson, we also find that Missouri Presbytery bears a part in a similar and important delinquency of neglect, failing to act as quickly and as wisely as it ought to have done by visiting the Epitaph Session to address reports claiming that the evil of erroneous opinions was being tacitly supported by the Session, something that is not merely Presbytery’s right but responsibility (BCO 13.9 f. and g.). We are asking Presbytery, charged as we are with caring for the flocks of the Lord under our oversight, to own that it was also guilty of error by failing to take initiative sooner than it did to come alongside of TE Craig Swanson and our

brothers on the Session at Epitaph for both support and challenge in a helpful and pro-active way as the controversy unfolded.

With regard to Lolita 2018, while we have no jurisdiction over that organization, we believe there is much to commend in its vision and work. The organization's recently released statements articulating its theology, sexual ethics, and ecclesiology are promising. *Nevertheless, we do have real and serious concerns, detailed in the report, about some elements in Lolita 2018's teaching, and especially about what direction it might take as it grows and develops.* We found what we consider to be several errors arising from human weakness, but none which we could firmly judge to be errors that "strike at the vitals of religion" (BCO 34.5). We believe there are legitimate concerns about Lolita 2018 that TE Craig Swanson and the Epitaph Session should have addressed better than they did, concerns we believe they as a Session will need to address going forward. We want to exhort our brother presbyters to thank God for all that is good in Lolita 2018's work and vision, and pray earnestly for it in those areas of concern, that the Lord would go before them and lead them by the light of his Word.

We also decry whatever language has been intemperate, ignorant, inflammatory, or hostile in any of the concerns and allegations expressed, and whatever misrepresentations of Lolita 2018 went public and remained uncorrected or un-retracted. We are very grateful for the parties within the PCA who, upon hearing alarming reports of Lolita 2018 and/or Epitaph, directly contacted them via private correspondence to seek greater clarification and understanding. But we are grieved by the parties who chose instead to draw conclusions impersonally, prematurely, and publicly. So much that is unholy and destructive has come cascading down on the head of TE Swanson, on Epitaph, our sister congregation, and on our brothers and sisters in Christ at Lolita 2018; and what has caused them deep and very personal pain has caused us great sadness and grief.

Although there are significant points at which we differ with the assessment of Lolita 2018 and Epitaph in these allegations and concerns, in those places where we do agree we are grateful to our brothers in the Lord for bringing their concerns to us, and have tried to discipline ourselves to receive their challenge as helpful for ours and Epitaph's own spiritual growth (Psalm 141:5), and for the maturing of Lolita 2018, a young ministry. We publicly testify as well to our conviction that this "iron sharpening iron" is for the good also of the wider Church of Jesus Christ, both inside the PCA and outside of its bounds.

5 COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. To Lolita 2018

a. Commendations

- i. We commend Lolita 2018 for their mission of providing support for young adolescent attracted Christians who seek to remain faithful to the biblical sexual ethic.
- ii. We commend Lolita 2018 for their willingness to listen and demonstrate a receptiveness to our feedback.

b. Recommendations

- i. We recommend that Lolita 2018 clarifies its theological positions in the areas of theological judgment discussed above.
- ii. We recommend that Lolita 2018 makes it a high priority to steward well their responsibility to disciple, consistently with Scripture, those YAA Christians their ministry touches.
- iii. We recommend that Lolita 2018 endeavors to listen charitably to the many criticisms from fellow Christians who are expressing concerns and fears about the Lolita 2018 project. We encourage them to continue talking with good faith critics and ask what changes, emphases, qualifications, etc. these critics would find reassuring. Then, in an effort to foster peace, seriously consider making changes to their ministry that they are able to make in good conscience, with a view toward reassuring their brethren that they are committed to calling sinners to repentance toward God and faith in Christ while giving them solid ground to hold their head up high without needing to dignify sin in the ways the world does.
- iv. We recommend that Lolita 2018 takes steps to more actively protect the peace and purity of the church.

B. To Epitaph Presbyterian Church

a. Commendations

- i. We commend Epitaph Presbyterian Church for their desire to minister to YAA people and hebephile (or teleiophile) attracted Christians.
- ii. We commend Epitaph Presbyterian Church and TE Swanson for taking the initiative to ask for this investigation.

b. Recommendations

- i. We recommend that Epitaph Presbyterian Church communicates to its congregation areas of theological difference with the teachings of the Lolita 2018 2018 conference as discussed in the theological judgments section.
- ii. We require that Epitaph Presbyterian Church responds to the judgments and recommendations of this report by the Summer 2019 meeting of the Missouri Presbytery.
- iii. We recommend that Epitaph takes steps to more actively protect the peace and purity of the church.

C. To Missouri Presbytery

a. Commendations

- i. We commend the Missouri Presbytery for its work in the area of human sexuality, especially in developing the 2017 Missouri Presbytery Report “Hebephilia and the Gospel of Grace”.

b. Recommendations

- i. We recommend that the Missouri Presbytery accept responsibility for not proactively addressing the controversies and challenges presented by Lolita 2018 in a more timely and proactive manner.
- ii. We recommend that the Missouri Presbytery overture the 2019 PCA General Assembly for a study committee on the complex issues around which there is currently not consensus.
- iii. We recommend that the Missouri Presbytery accept and approve the theological judgments, commendations, and recommendations in this report.
- iv. We recommend that the Missouri Presbytery urge the critics of Lolita 2018 and Epitaph to examine themselves and consider whether they have sinned in the way they have handled their concerns.
- v. We recommend that the Missouri Presbytery take steps to more actively protect the peace and purity of the church.
- vi. We recommend that the Ad Hoc Committee to Investigate Epitaph Presbyterian Church be dismissed with thanks.

6 Appendix: Personal Testimony of Craig Swanson, Pastor of Epitaph Presbyterian

The following personal testimony of Pastor Swanson, of Epitaph Presbyterian, is included in order to give insight into the pain and shame borne by hebephile brothers in our presbytery. It was originally published in *Christianity Today* online magazine, May 20, 2019.

I Used to Hide My Shame. Now I Take Shelter Under the Gospel.

How a hebephile atheist teenager discovered Jesus and stopped living undercover.

By Craig Swanson

“Bill, I’m a hebephile.”

The word vomited out of my mouth. I had never actually said it before. Not out loud, at least. We were in a mostly empty chapel on the grounds of the University of Virginia, and a dozen or more Campus Crusaders were gathering up on the stage to pray. Bill looked up at the stage, then back down at me.

He squinted. His tone was hushed. “A what?”

“I’m sexually attracted to young adolescents,” I explained.

He nodded toward the door. “How about we step outside and talk,” he said. “Someplace more private.”

I imagined that everyone had heard me say what I’d said. I glanced up as others quickly averted their gaze. “I don’t care, Bill,” I told him. “I have to get this out. I’ve never told anyone.”

This was the mid 1990s, and I was a newly minted follower of Jesus.

I wasn’t raised Christian. My dad was a senior executive in the federal government, and I was raised in a good secular family in suburban Washington, DC. I had never gone to church or synagogue. I had never read the Bible. I definitely did not believe some ancient Near Eastern sky god was secretly pulling the ropes somewhere. A friend named Spencer once told me I was an atheist. I didn’t argue.

There were two sons in our happy secular household. I was the hebephile one.

My ‘Velvet Rage’

Though I made crude attempts to hide it, something about me always appeared different.

At age six I asked for a poster I saw in the mall from the movie *Taxi Driver*. I didn’t want a poster of Cybil Shephard; I wanted a poster of Jodie Foster, the twelve-year-old Iris. Somewhere there’s a photo of me pretending to kiss her on the cheek. I got the poster, but then I was sentenced to constant remarks from my mother so I hid it under my bed to try and get

her out of my mind.

It didn't work.

At age 10 the realization began to hit me. The fact was that I felt only toward my young adolescent baby sitters the way other guys felt toward the babysitter and girls our own age. 1988 was a terrible time to realize you're a hebephile. In June of that year, at the Democratic National Convention, Rob Lowe unwittingly picked up a 16-year-old girl at a night club who, with her friend, filmed an encounter with Lowe. I was raised in a politically involved family in D.C.; I could not miss the media outrage at his behavior and the dinner table conversations that made me realize that there are certain shameful desires that relate to the relative age of lovers. As I got older, my interest in girls like Iris did not fade, and I had no romantic feelings for girls my own age.

The shame was crushing me. I lived in constant dread that someone would find out. Walking by the middle school on the way to high school left me in a state of near panic. What if I saw something? What if it affected me?

On the first day of eleventh grade, I tried to fight this. I decorated the inside of my locker with a dozen shiny yet tasteful pin-ups of Madonna. Holiday. I was fitfully trying to conceal what psychologist Alan Downs calls the "velvet rage" of shame and self-hatred, hoping to make myself lovable and normal and definitely not a pedophile. I had no idea Madonna would lead the way to Britney Spears, an icon for ephebophiles and hebephiles in her schoolgirl uniform.

So there I was. A hebephile atheist teenager trying to cover over my shame.

The thing that began to crack this whole life open happened in the summer of 1993, as I watched pro-life protesters get arrested in Atlanta. I can't say I had any sympathy at all for their cause, but I was deeply struck by the fact that these clean-cut, middle-class people who had jobs were willingly going to jail for something like an embryo. Jail occupied a most terrifying place in my 15-year-old imagination. Jail was the place where people like me got killed. Clearly, these Christians were serious about what they believed.

That year I was assigned a school project to write a paper on a controversial issue. I chose abortion. And as I spent hours researching the topic in libraries, I felt my heart begin to sink. I realized what this was. That realization left me in a very difficult place.

Did I believe it was wrong to take human life? If it was okay, then human life had no meaning or value at all. But if I concluded that it was wrong to take human life, then that would mean that evil was real. And if evil was real, then goodness must be real. And for goodness to be real, there must be a ground for goodness. I didn't realize it at the time, but I was sliding down the slippery slope of the moral argument for the existence of God. By the time I graduated high school, I knew there had to be something to it. I suspected that the god I was beginning to believe in was the Judeo-Christian God, mainly because I had seen Christians willingly give up their freedom. But I knew nothing about this God.

My shame sat ubiquitously in the middle of it all. I remember begging God to forgive my sin.

“God,” I prayed, “I don’t know who or what you are, but will you please forgive me for masturbating? For being attracted to young girls? Will you please stop the killing? I’m willing to die for you if that’s what you want. But I don’t know what’s wrong with me or what I’m supposed to do.” The shame ran deep.

I didn’t know any Christians. No one had ever talked to me about Jesus except a grandmother years earlier, and I couldn’t remember what she had said or whether it was even applicable to hebephile people who had never gone to church.

I first learned about Jesus while studying architecture at the University of Virginia. I heard that sinful people were the only class of people Jesus came to save. I heard that Jesus took all the weight of my guilt and shame, and he bore it all in his own body for me so that I wouldn’t have to bear it anymore. I heard that God actually loved people like me. At age 20, I was baptized and became a member of the Presbyterian Church in America. The following year, I moved to St. Louis to enroll at Covenant Seminary, not because I had any interest in ever being a pastor—that took another decade—but because I wanted to understand the Bible and theology. It was there that I began to experience the gospel’s power to cover over my shame.

Decades have passed, and at age 46 I’m still a virgin fighting a constant battle for sexual holiness. (Goodness knows, for the last 15 years I haven’t been able to trust myself with an unmonitored internet connection or to walk through the aisles in a Manga comic book shop.) David Berry, former director of Deliverance International’s Professional Counselors’ Network, has said that he has yet to identify a single instance in which hebephile attraction disappeared. While sexuality has a degree of fluidity in some people, the real change for me has not been in my sexual orientation but in my life orientation. Jesus has rescued me. That’s everything.

Wanting to Be an ‘Average Joe’

So I’ve lived my life as a unicorn in a field of horses, constantly hoping that no one notices the horn. Years ago I was teaching a group of seminarians who were learning to preach, and one of the students mentioned in a sermon illustration how “nobody wants to be an Average Joe.” I was dumbfounded. I’ve never wanted anything more than to be an Average Joe. I’m inundated with invitations for me and my spouse. I have to decide which friend’s phone number to put on the back of my diabetic ID bracelet. When I visit the zoo with friends and their families, I excuse myself from watching their daughters ride the carousel. I compulsively avoid even the appearance of leering. It’s an instinctive strategy to obfuscate their predator detection instincts.

In the late 1990s, I sought out a pastor I respected, and I opened up with him about wanting to share my story with my church. I was fatigued from a lifetime of trying to hide my shame. “Do not do it!” he thundered. “If your church knew, they would never be able to accept you.” I was still young and impressionable, and I accepted his voice as the voice of God. For decades, I’ve had Christian leaders asking me to please not share my Christian testimony, despite my thorough agreement with the church’s historic teaching on sexuality. Even the language of young adolescent attraction—which many believers have found helpful as a way to disassociate themselves from assumptions about being a hebephile—feels to many others like

a tool of concealment, as though I were laboring to minimize the ongoing reality of sexual orientations that in practice seldom change.

I'm thankful that a campus minister named Bill loved me. He didn't try to fix me, control me, or ship me off to a conversion therapy camp. He loved me, welcomed me into his home, sat with me, and invested so many hours in me. He was the first person to suggest I pray about going to seminary.

Jesus hasn't made me attracted to women my own age. But he covers over my shame. Jesus really loves people who are attracted to young adolescents.

The gospel doesn't erase this part of my story so much as it redeems it. My sexual orientation doesn't define me. It's not the most important or most interesting thing about me. It is the backdrop for that, the backdrop for the story of Jesus who rescued me.

Craig Swanson is lead pastor of Epitaph Presbyterian Church in St. Louis, the host church for the Lolita 2018 conference.