

**The following is a workshop summary from the “MAKING ROOM FOR ALL”  
CONFERENCE, held in Grand Rapids October 29-31, 2009**

**A Reformed Orthodoxy of Inclusion: Theologically Making Room for All**

Norman J. Kansfield

Reporter Judy Parr

Speaker's Professional Position: After a ministerial and professorial career in the Reformed Church in America—including faculty positions at Western Theological Seminary and Professor of Theology and President of New Brunswick Seminary—Norm Kansfield was deposed by the General Synod of 2005 for having presided at the marriage of his daughter Ann and daughter-in-law Jennifer.

Supporting his conclusion that “nothing in what the Bible intends to teach in any way speaks against the full inclusion of LGBT persons within the life and ministry of the church,” Norman Kansfield supplied those attending his workshop with copies of twelve distributed a document outlining the steps leading to that conclusion. The first section outlines an orthodoxy of inclusion a foundation for making room for all. The second section outlines six factors that shaped the Bible's concerns regarding family, marriage, sexual relationships, human relationships, the nature of God, and Jesus' teachings of “a very different understanding of family, sexuality, and the valuing of individuals.”

Kansfield offered the following presuppositions: “Persons do not choose their sexual identity/orientation. Sexual identity/orientation is genetically determined in the same way that race or handedness is. It is, therefore, a gift and a calling from God.”

Kansfield next discussed the Heidelberg Catechism question and answer, describing it as the “grand conclusion” as well as the beginning of the Catechism. Individuals reading the Catechism do not do so as lost souls but as those who by God's grace “belong ... in life and death” to our “faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.” We baptize children because by God's grace they too belong. God has included them in a relationship of belonging, even before their parents and congregation promise to raise them in the faith. The “Heidelberg Catechism,” said Kansfield, “forms an amazing foundation to help us understand God's grace.” Our salvation does not depend on us; it depends on God through Jesus Christ. “All that follows is about our living in ... gratitude in response.”

Unlike the abstract qualities that the Belgic Confession uses to describe God, “eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, unchangeable, infinite, almighty... source of all good,” the Heidelberg Catechism names God as “my Father in heaven.” God is revealed by what we read in the Scriptures. Borrowing terms from theologian Hendrikus Berkhof, Kansfield described God as “the Condescending Transcendent One,” the creator of all who is making space for all, by surrendering some autonomy in order to have relationships with creation, especially humankind. Supporting his statements by quotations from scripture and Berkhof, Kansfield also described God as “the Defenseless Absolute Power” and the “Changeable Faithful One.”

“If this is the way we understand God,” said Kansfield, “what should the Church look like?” God’s condescendence, defenselessness, and changeable faithfulness challenge the Church to embody not only God’s transcendence but also “God’s commitment to make room for all persons,” God’s readiness, “on behalf of human beings, to be the defenseless one,” and “to change in order to bring about our salvation—our being in right relationship with God.”

Resources:

The Bible.

*Belgic Confession* (1561), *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563), and *Canons of Dort* (1619).

Berkhof, Hendrickus. *Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Study of the Faith*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986).