

Box Turtle Kincaid Peddles Distorted Orthodoxy Test While Promoting Immorality

Part 1: The Problem with the Call for Retranslating the Heidelberg Catechism and Kincaid's Bogus Charge of My "Unorthodox Approach to Doctrine"

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Timothy Kincaid, blogging for the homosexualist website "Box Turtle," has gone beyond even the box turtle's reputation for confusion and distorted reality in his posting, "Robert Gagnon's Unorthodox Approach to Doctrine" (June 24, 2008; online: <http://www.boxturtlebulletin.com/2008/06/24/2266>). Kincaid states that my alleged "homophobia trumps written witness" as regards my arguments against both a new translation of the Heidelberg Catechism and a homosexualist reading of Jesus' encounter with a centurion. He seeks to discredit me as "unorthodox" to "those who insist on a literalist interpretation of Scripture." However, his uncivil efforts only underscore how little he understands, or even cares to understand, the issues in question.

In this article I will address Kincaid's critique of my view on retranslating the Heidelberg Catechism (1563); in Part 2 Kincaid's critique of my understanding of the historical core behind Jesus' encounter with a Capernaum official.

Kincaid argues that it was wrong for me to oppose a translation of the Heidelberg Catechism that aims at removing from the 1962 Miller-Osterhaven English translation (which at this point copies from the NEB translation of 1 Cor 6:9-10) a reference to "homosexual perversion" that was not in the original German of this 16th century document (Question 87, 4.086). "It is his own [ideology] that causes Gagnon to insist that the Catechism be translated to state the words that *should be* on the page rather than the ones that are there."

This is a classic case of “Box Turtle Kincaid” distortion. I am not arguing that the Catechism should be “translated” to insert words that are not there. I am rather arguing that a *retranslation* for the singular purpose of advancing a homosexualist agenda is both unnecessary and perverse, for the following reasons:

1. ***Retranslations of confessions are discouraged in the PCUSA unless errors in the original translation fundamentally affect the confession's status as a reliable exposition of Scripture.*** Otherwise there would be no end to retranslations. Changing any text in the PCUSA *Book of Confessions* is a time-consuming (and costly) process requiring not only (1) approval of a General Assembly but also: (2) the appointment of a committee consisting of at least 15 elders and ministers to consider the proposal and report its recommendation to the next General Assembly; (3) approval of two-thirds of the presbyteries; (4) approval by the next General Assembly (G-18.0201). The reason for such an elaborate and demanding process is to set the bar for establishing the necessity of a retranslation very high indeed. No English translation of a confession is a verbatim rendering of the original, perfect and without error. Translations once made and approved for inclusion in the Constitution are retained, even if there are some inaccuracies, unless there are strong grounds for believing that the inaccuracies affect fundamentally the confession's status as an “authentic and reliable exposition of what *Scripture* leads us to believe and do” (W-4.4003; my emphasis). As four Presbyterian theology professors (two from Princeton Seminary) have asked in their critique of proposals for retranslating the Heidelberg Catechism:

Will the Presbyteries who have sent these overtures, together with their academic sponsors, next ask that we revert to the seventeenth century texts of the Westminster standards, without the chapters on divorce and the Holy Spirit, and restoring the claim that the Pope is the anti-Christ, as the original indisputably said?

--Bruce L. McCormack, E. David Willis, Michael D. Bush, and Richard E. Burnett, [Letter to the 2008 General Assembly](#), p. 3 (see pp. 1-2 for why other alleged translation problems in the Catechism serve only as “cover” for the single-minded homosexualist goal of removing “homosexual perversion” from the confessions)

2. ***The Catechism clearly alludes to, and partially cites, 1 Cor 6:9, which expressly lists “men who lie with a male” among offenders barred from the kingdom of God.*** The German original clearly alludes to the offender list in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (citing 5 of the 10 offender groups in the same order), a point confirmed by Zacharias Ursinus, the primary author of the Catechism, in his *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism* (p. 467; ET by G. W. Williard). First Corinthians 6:9 includes

among the offender groups “men who lie with a male” (*arsenokoitai*, a word specially coined from the Greek [Septuagint] translation of the prohibition of men “lying” [*koite*] with a male [*arsen*]” in Lev 18:22 and 20:13). For “a brief review of how we know that 1 Corinthians 6:9 rejects all homosexual practice,” see the appendix (pp. 6-11) to my article, [“Why a New Translation of the Heidelberg Catechism Is Not Needed: And Why Homosexualist Forces in the PCUSA Seek It.”](#) So there is no question here of adding anything to the English translation of the Catechism that affects detrimentally the Catechism’s status as an “authentic and reliable exposition of what *Scripture* leads us to believe and do.”

3. ***A homosexualist agenda, not translation purity: Why there is no outrage at the addition of “the covetous” and “swindlers” to the English translation from the text of 1 Cor 6:9.*** The German original also leaves out any mention of “the covetous” (*pleonektai*) and “swindlers” (*harpages*) from its allusion to 1 Cor 6:9, reinserted as “grabbers” and “swindlers” in the NEB Bible translation appropriated here by the 1962 Miller-Osterhaven translation of the Catechism. However, no one is calling for a retranslation of the Catechism because the 1962 English translation has added these words from the text of 1 Cor 6:9. Had these two terms been the *only* terms added to Heidelberg Catechism A87 *no one* would ever had called for a retranslation of the Catechism. So it is clear that “translation purity” is not the concern behind the push for retranslation but rather a less-than-fully-honest homosexualist agenda. Homosexualist advocates in the PCUSA by and large have no objection to the addition of “grabbers” and “swindlers” because (1) these terms are clearly in the text of Scripture to which the Catechism alludes and (2) they have no objection to what Scripture states at this point. The only reason, then, why they are could have an objection to the addition of the term “homosexual perversion” to the Catechism is because they do object to what Scripture says.

[Note: The 1962 translation inserted the NEB’s translation of 1 Cor 6:9, which conflates two terms in the Greek, *malakoi* (literally, “soft men,” referring to the passive receptive partners in man-male intercourse) and *arsenokoitai* (literally, “men who lie with a male,” the active partners). As a conflation translation that converts these two related offender groups into the single abstract vice of “homosexual perversion” the NEB rendering is not an ideal translation. Nevertheless, it adequately conveys the overall point of the text of 1 Cor 6:9.]

4. ***The probable reason for the omission of any reference to homosexual practice in the Catechism: It would scandalize children.*** Given what sixteenth century Reformers have to say about homosexual practice it is clear that the reason for not citing “men who lie with a male” from 1 Cor 6:9 had nothing to do with some secret

- acceptance of homosexual practice. To the contrary: Zacharias Ursinus and Kaspar Olevianus, the authors of the Catechism, almost certainly omitted reference to homosexual practice because the Catechism was used to instruct children. In the sixteenth century explicit mention of homosexual practice would have been not only unnecessary—since no one in sixteenth-century Reform communities was advocating homosexual practice, let alone engaging in it—but also obscene. Including mention of homosexual offenders would have unnecessarily scandalized young minds.
5. ***This supposition is confirmed by the strong but oblique visceral opposition to homosexual practice from Calvin on.*** Calvin himself, the father of Reformed faith, when he comments on Rom 1:26-27, 1 Cor 6:9, and Jude 7 in his commentaries, does so only in an oblique way because of the deep heinousness of the offense, referring to desires and actions that are “monstrous,” “polluted,” “most filthy and detestable,” and “the most abominable.” As late as the first third of the twentieth century even the Loeb Classical Library series, consisting of hundreds of volumes of texts from the classical world published by Harvard University Press with the original Greek (or Latin) on one side of the page and an English translation on the other, routinely translated just those portions of ancient Greek texts dealing with homosexual practice into Latin rather than English in order to avoid corrupting youthful minds.
 6. ***Hermeneutical regression: Today’s homosexualist motive for deleting “homosexual perversion” stands in diametrical opposition to the original motive for its omission.*** Commissioning a retranslation of the Heidelberg Confession for the primary purpose of making homosexual unions more acceptable in the church would be hermeneutically regressive. The reason for the Reformers’ omission of any mention of homosexual offenders from an allusion to 1 Cor 6:9 was their recognition of how bad and obscene homosexual practice was. Retranslating the whole document just to satisfy a homosexualist agenda would be as perverse as commissioning a new translation that would eliminate the terms “covetous” and “swindler” for the express purpose of making economically exploitative conduct more palatable in our own time.
 7. ***The hypocrisy of the “Spirit, not letter” people suddenly so obsessed by the “letter” is apparent.*** Ironically (and hypocritically), homosexualists who most loudly trumpet their desire to put Spirit over Letter when it comes to interpreting the scriptural text for the express purpose of ignoring the strong biblical witness against homosexual practice are here attempting to put Letter over Spirit. The spirit of the text of the Catechism is clear enough. It is the exact opposite of the attempt now being made to make the Confessions open to homosexual practice.

Those making the attempt are the same persons who for years have shown little interest in studying the numerous strong arguments for a male-female prerequisite in Scripture generally and in 1 Cor 6:9 in particular; little interest in reading the Book of Order's ordination standard for sexuality (G-6.0106b) in a reasonable way; and little interest in discerning the apparent historical motivation behind the omission of terms for homosexual practice in the Catechism's allusion to 1 Cor 6:9.

Given these considerations, there is little justification for a *retranslation* of the Heidelberg Catechism. It is a shame that I have to restate most of these points from my online article, ["Why a New Translation of the Heidelberg Catechism Is Not Needed: And Why Homosexualist Forces in the PCUSA Seek It."](#) Kincaid chose to rely on a few quotations in a [Christian Post](#) article rather than consult my fuller online article. Regrettably, Kincaid shows more interest in misrepresenting my work to others, in order to score a self-serving, ideologically driven point, than in actually understanding my argument. This is the mark of someone who, despite all his protestations to the contrary, has little interest in the truth when it is inconvenient to his position.