

Open Letter to Dr. Jeffrey Weima

Q. What does the Lord require in the ninth commandment?

A. God's will is that I . . .

“twist no one's words”

“do what I can to guard and advance my neighbour's good name.”

(Excerpts from Heidelberg Catechism Question and Answer 112)

May 13, 2024

Dear Dr. Jeffrey Weima:

I appreciate your dedication to serious Bible study and share a deep desire to grow in understanding how Biblical teachings apply today in our personal and communal living as followers of Jesus.

Drawing on shared foundations and the Codes of Conduct for CRC pastors and for professors at Calvin Seminary, this letter requests that you reconsider your public critique of the film 1946, consider whether an apology is warranted, and take reasonable steps to make amends for failures to live up to the basic ethical standards in the two Codes of Conduct.

This request for reconsideration is based on questions under three foundational principles, rooted in the 9th Commandment and the published Codes of Conduct for Calvin seminary professors and CRC pastors:

Honesty, fair representation, integrity, using power to serve

(standards in the Codes of Conducts for Calvin Seminary professors and pastors in the CRCNA)

- Is it fair to deliberately and repeatedly misrepresent a documentary in which real people tell their stories as “Hollywood” fiction and manufactured propaganda?
- Is it fair representation to totally ignore the fact that the documentary includes the witness of Pastor Sal Roggio who presents the traditional position, never changes his mind, and is presented with dignity, respected by the others, with hope of reconciliation? Is it possible your review engages in selective, biased representation of the honest struggle of other Christians?
- Is it honest and fair to distort content in the film in order to dismiss it? As examples, the film shows how this version of the Bible contributed to homosexuality becoming a culture war issue, but it does not claim it started it, as you state; and the film does consider the witness of Jesus, which you allege it does not, in more holistic ways than the specific verse you cite.

Respectful, hopeful, “charitable toward those with whom you disagree”

(standards in the Code of Conduct for Calvin Seminary professors)

- Is it respectful to begin by dismissing Christian brothers and sisters as fools?
- Is it hopeful to belittle, label and dismiss other Biblical scholars without considering what they have learned in their study of the Bible?
- Does this critique meet the standard of “charitable toward those with whom you disagree”?

Curious, willing to change and grow, self-aware of strengths and weaknesses

(standards in the Code of Conduct for Calvin Seminary professors)

- Is it ethical to impugn motives to the persons sharing their story that are contrary to the evidence? The film's on-going dialogue with the father/pastor who presents contrary views is evidence of the film's purpose, to encourage learning and dialogue.
- Is it ethical to misrepresent the motives of the sponsors and label and dismiss them as misguided souls who are weaponizing the film, without evidence? Hesus Project CRC showed this film to encourage dialogue, because it brings together serious Bible study and the real lives of people

affected by how we use the Bible. The response of most viewers has been healthy dialogue and reflection, which the CRC Synod itself encouraged.

- What does a one-line reference to an apology for the historic and continued failings of a denomination towards LGBTQ+ Christians mean, when the rest of the piece engages in a belittling, demeaning dismissal of Ed Oxford, Kathy Baldock, and Sharon Roggio? Does this show “willingness to change and grow,” serious “self-awareness”, or even simple “curiosity?” I personally found more of Jesus’ way in Ed Oxford’s response to his attackers, especially when he speaks about his journey as a Jesus follower in the panel discussion that followed the film, than in a one-line apology with no change in behaviour.

May I suggest that you invite Ed Oxford and Kathy Baldock to Calvin Seminary, create a space where the Calvin community could listen to their testimony, and then discern if they are sincere Christ-followers on a learning journey or tools of the devil to be condemned and dismissed without a fair hearing.

This response is public because Abide has chosen to amplify your critique through advertising, presumably with your agreement. I hope other readers will view the film for themselves and discern for themselves what is genuine and helpful to fulfill our own calling to love God and love our neighbour.

Learning to live the Hesed way,

Kathy Vandergrift