

Synod 2013

Preamble to the church's position regarding the use of modern media and related technologies

As with all other aspects of life, **modern media and related technologies** and their use must be subject to the guidance of God's Word. This Word calls us to live holily, i.e. separately from the world ^a. However, man is **by nature** inclined to all evil and incapable of doing any good. Still, the requirement continues to apply that we must depart from evil.

Much of the content accessible via **modern media and related technologies** as they exist today is contrary to God's Word and commandment. However, we must recognize that the use of many forms of **modern media and communication technologies** is established in our society and among our people. As modern communication methods these technologies are widely used for economic and social purposes.

Considering the above, the use of **modern media and related technologies** can only be considered acceptable when the precepts of God's Word are observed and, additionally, it serves a useful purpose. Such a use will be characterized by overall restraint, and by striving for the maximum possible protection from undesirable content, developments and opportunities.

In addition, when using these technologies we must bear in mind the admonition to **not be conformed to this world** ^b, to **deny ungodliness** and worldly lusts ^c, to dwell as strangers and pilgrims on earth ^d, to obey the authorities set over us ^e, to be the light of the world, and in general to direct our lives to the honour of God's Name ^f. We are to do this while keeping far from all things whereby His Name is blasphemed and His commandments transgressed ^{h,i}.

a.1 Pet. 2:5; b. Rom. 12:2; c. Tit. 2:12; d. Hebr. 11:13, 1 Pet. 2:11; e. Rom. 13:1; f. 1 Cor. 10:31, Rom 12:1 ; g. H.C. answer 122; h. Prov. 12:13; i. Matt. 5:14

MTAC Notes:

- 1. This Preamble sets the general doctrinal framework for the Church to make pronouncements on the use of modern media and related technologies. As such it is a high level document that is fairly open to interpretation and requires further clarification, particularly as developments in media and related technologies are frequent and often unforeseen. Some of these further clarifications occur in the various Synod decisions listed below, which themselves show an evolution of the Church's policy to reflect social and technological changes. However, it will remain important to further define how the doctrinal position described above is implemented in daily life, for example what sort of activities are considered permissible or censurable. For this end, a set of more practical guidelines, based on this Preamble, would be of advantage.*
- 2. As suggested by the Synod report in De Wachter Sions (18 July 2013), this Preamble will likely be revised in the near future to add a comment on the necessity of the Church to apply church discipline if members make improper use of modern media and communication technologies. Such an addition is currently being discussed by the "Deputaatschap Moderne Media" in the Netherlands.*

Church position regarding the use of modern media and related technologies

The Synod of the Gereformeerde Gemeente in Nederland has made the following decisions regarding internet and modern media usage:

- Synod 1997. Considering the dangers ("sinful temptations") presented by open (i.e. unfiltered) internet access, use of unfiltered internet by members is censurable. A pulpit message is prepared that states that the use of the internet in families and for private purposes is censurable, particularly as the objections raised in the past against the television are at least as applicable to the amusements provided by the internet. The message also states a serious warning against the use of the computer for entertainment purposes such as playing of games, watching videos, etc.
- Synod 2001. Use of the internet is permitted (i.e. "not censurable") provided use is made of an internet service provider that uses a whitelist ("previously determined sites") and the use is for business purposes. Use of email, or internet for either private or business purposes is still discouraged ("dissuaded").
- Synod 2007. The official position of the church is reformulated. 'Out of concern for the congregations, connecting to the unfiltered internet via computers, cellular phones, or other devices is considered censurable, particularly as it exposes users to sinful temptations and useless wasting of time. Where the use of Internet is unavoidable (for business or study purposes), access should be to a closed (i.e. whitelisted) internet provider. If more access is required, access should be through such a filter as provides the best protection against unwanted sites. The use of Internet for private purposes is strongly discouraged. An Internet provider should be used that enables access to only those functions the user needs (e.g. emailing, internet banking). The use of computers and similar devices for entertainment purposes such as playing games, watching videos, etc. seriously warning against.
- Synod 2010. Use of the Internet must be restricted to that which is useful and necessary for study and career purposes, and to remain engaged in social discourse and commerce. When members unnecessarily use an internet filter less restrictive than that recommended by the Synod (i.e. KlikSafe), church discipline may be applied.
- Synod 2011. The Church may use the internet if such use is socially or economically necessary ("unavoidable"), and such use is with "necessary restraint".
- Synod 2013. A "Preamble" that sets the general doctrinal framework for the Church to make pronouncements on the use of modern media and related technologies is discussed and approved. The guidelines and discussions stated in previous Synod decisions (i.e. 1997 – 2011) remain in effect.