

11/14/2020

Protest of Decision Taken 11/11/2020 Regarding Rev. Lanning's Editorship of *Sword & Shield*

Information:

On Tuesday, November 11, 2020, the Publication Committee consisting of Tim Block, Terry Kaptein, and Harlow Kuiper brought the following advice to the consistory for adoption:

Recommendation: That the Byron Center PRC consistory require Rev. Lanning to resign as editor of the *Sword and Shield* publication for a time, and until such time that the consistory may approve of his involvement as editor. This would include all activity normally required of, or assigned to, an editor's position.

Grounds:

1. BCPRCs congregation is in a fragile state. Rev Lanning has a flock that is in turmoil and at this time his focus must be on the preaching of the Word and care of the congregation. The position of editor requires much time as Rev. Lanning also ministers to the many needs of the congregation he is called to serve at Byron Center PRC. Included in the many additional activities required of an editor are: meetings, writing articles, reviewing articles, answering various forms of correspondence and letters that are typical for that position, and interacting with the governing board regarding general business activities and issues. Being an editor reduces the important time spent with members of his own congregation, getting to better understand her concerns and needs and being more involved in shepherding the flock. The additional time gained from not being editor would allow this aspect of his ministry to more greatly flourish. Jer. 23: 4. "And I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall they be lacking, saith the Lord".
2. Rev. Lanning has not asked permission, been given approval, or sought the advice of his consistory to accept the position of editor. On June 17, 2020, the Byron Center PRC consistory ruled that "Rev. Lanning erred in not seeking the advice and approval of the consistory before agreeing to take on the work of being editor of the *Sword and Shield* publication". According to the Form of Ordination, it is the duty of the elders in regard to the welfare and good order in the church, "to be assistant with their good advice to the ministers of the Word" and "to have regard unto the doctrine and conversation of the ministers of the Word".

The relevant minutes from the Tuesday, November 11, 2020 meeting are as follows:

Article 4. New publication committee presents recommendation to require Rev Lanning to resign as the editor of the Sword and Shield. Supplement #4

- a. Motion to elide ground #1 due to it making the consistory guilty of hypocrisy. FAILS*
- b. Motion to approve the recommendation of the committee. CARRIES.*
- c. Bryan registers his negative vote.*
- d. Dewey registers his negative vote.*
- e. Motion to distribute the decision and grounds to the congregation via email. CARRIES*
- f. Motion to approve the work of the committee. CARRIES*
- g. Motion to disband the committee. CARRIES*

Protest:

I hereby protest this decision and ask the consistory to overturn this decision for the following reasons:

1. The grounds given: Include false information; do not support the motion; twist the one scripture passage used; apply the wisdom of man which is “earthly, sensual, devilish” (James 3:15); and exhibit cruelty towards Rev. Lanning.
 - a. BCPRC is not in a fragile state. The spiritual condition of BCPRC is, as one elder remarked at a previous meeting, stronger than it has ever been. To claim that the congregation is fragile reveals a carnal attitude towards the church that represents the wisdom of man. The congregation of BCPRC is strong because of the faithful, God-glorifying and Christ-exalting preaching. It is true that there is a small minority of weaker members who may be in a fragile state and may be themselves in turmoil. It may be the case that these weaker members see a militant church bearing a sword (Eph. 6:17) and faint and call for the sword to be sheathed. It may also be the case that these members are not fragile, but hardened against the preaching and rebukes of Rev. Lanning, which is to say they are hardened against Jesus Christ; “They hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly” (Amos 5:10). Or, there may be those who are genuinely weak and fragile. This the consistory should investigate. However, what defines the strength or weakness of a church is not the feelings of a few, or of many. What defines the strength of a congregation is what proceeds from the pulpit. Which is to say, the strength of BCPRC is Jesus Christ himself. When the consistory says the congregation is fragile and in turmoil, it accuses Christ, who is the chief cornerstone (Eph. 2:20) of being fragile and being in turmoil. In addition, to single out one group (those who are supposedly fragile) who does not like Rev. Lanning serving as editor of *Sword & Shield*, over against the rest of the congregation who highly values Rev. Lanning’s work as editor, is to show partiality (James 3:17) and create divisions (1 Cor. 1:10). The congregation was being led, fed, instructed, and strengthened. With this decision the consistory did not “wholly follow the Lord our God,” but we “made the heart of the people melt” as did the 10 unfaithful spies (Josh. 14:8).
 - b. The one Bible verse mentioned in the recommendation does not support the motion. The consistory understands “shepherding” to mean socializing (“spending time with members”). Jeremiah 23:4 speaks of the glorious work of a shepherd in feeding his flock. The shepherd does not feed the sheep by socializing with them. The shepherd feeds his sheep and shepherds his flock by proclaiming to the sheep the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the “power of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16). In fact, with this ground, the consistory would undermine the work of Rev. Lanning by taking him out of his study and putting him in the coffee shop, the living room, or the pole barn. Although this might make him more popular, it would make him less faithful in the work which God calls him to, namely to “preach the word” (2 Tim. 4:2). Rev. Lanning does not need to socialize with the people to know their “concerns and needs.” He knows what their concerns and needs are from the word of God, and he knows what will minister to those concerns and needs (“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified” Isaiah 61:1–3). Instead of rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15), the ground twists the one verse used and applies the wisdom of man (“better understand her concerns and needs and being more involved in shepherding the flock”) which is “earthly, sensual, devilish” (James 3:15).

- c. The second ground speaks of a motion passed five months ago when the consistory declared that Rev. Lanning erred in not seeking the advice of the consistory before taking up the work of editor of *Sword & Shield*. To now dredge that motion up five months later, *and to do so publicly*, after the matter was declared by the consistory to be settled, is cruel and does not manifest the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: “For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and *their iniquities will I remember no more*” (Heb. 8:12). The consistory needs to be warned about the judgment that results when, having received mercy, they show no mercy in return: “For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy” (James 2:13).
 - d. The second ground may not be used as support of the motion, when in fact it contradicts it. The ground quotes the *Form for Ordination of Elders and Deacons* where the elders are instructed “to be assistant with their good advice to the ministers of the Word.” The form speaks of “good advice” yet the motion “requires” Rev. Lanning to resign as editor. This is lording it over Rev. Lanning, which leads to the second and third grounds why this motion needs to be overturned.
2. This decision will bind the conscience of Rev. Lanning which is free before God to fulfill his vows.
 - a. As we stated in our letter to Hudsonville PRC and Unity PRC, Rev. Lanning’s “work in this publication is a matter of his conscience.” The consistory, *by decision*, has stated Rev. Lanning’s work in *Sword & Shield* is a matter of his conscience. Now the consistory seeks to bind Rev. Lanning’s conscience, not according to the word of God, but according to the shifting sands of man’s opinions and feelings. By using man’s wisdom to create this new law for Rev. Lanning, (“That the Byron Center PRC require Rev. Lanning to resign as editor”) the consistory wounds Rev. Lanning’s conscience, and violates Belgic Confession Article 32 by departing “from those things which Christ, our only Master, hath instituted.” The consistory ought also to consider the words of Jesus to the Pharisees: “Ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers” (Luke 11:46).
 - b. The consistory simply has no right to rule over this aspect of Rev. Lanning’s life. Fitting are the words of John Calvin: “I assert the one point that necessity ought not to be imposed upon consciences in those matters from which they have been freed by Christ; and unless freed, as we have previously taught, they cannot rest with God. They should acknowledge one King, their deliverer Christ, and should be governed by one law of freedom, the holy Word of the gospel, if they would retain the grace which once they obtained in Christ. They must be held in no bondage, and bound by no bounds” (Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.10.1, 2.1180).
 3. Therefore, this decision makes the consistory guilty of lording it over Rev. Lanning.
 - a. The decision is a violation of Article 84 of the Church Order which reads, “No Church shall in any way lord it over other Churches, no Minister over other Ministers, no Elder or Deacon over other Elders or Deacons.” By “requiring” Rev. Lanning to resign an office he holds (editor) as is his right in the office of all believer, the consistory has lorded it over Rev. Lanning. According to MVD, Article 84 stipulates that there “shall be no lording, no domination, no assumption of authority of ... one office-bearer over another.” It is Rev. Lanning’s right through the office of believer to occupy the position of editor, just as it is the right for any elder to edit a magazine or serve on a school board, to give two examples, and to “require” our pastor to resign from any of these lawful positions is to lord it over him.
 - i. “Furthermore that they [the elders] will not lay claim to any authority nor to any liberty to lord it over the ministers (of the Word) nor over their church, and that they will not introduce any laws according to their own whims, but that they will abide by the rules set by churches and synods” (Articles of Wesel 1568, *Translation of Ecclesiastical Manual*, 31)
 - b. The consistory is instructed, according to the *Form for Ordination of Elders and Deacons* “to be assistant with their good counsel and advice to the ministers of the Word, yea, also to serve all Christians with advice and consolation.” Nowhere is it stated or implied that we may lord it over another office-bearer by “requiring” that a minister cease work that he has the right to perform,

functioning in the office of all believer (“The anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him” (1 John 2:27) and “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Gal. 5:1).

4. With this decision the consistory takes up the sword against Rev. Lanning and the vows he made before God
 - a. Rev. Lanning made a vow before God in the Formula of Subscription (“but that we are disposed to refute and contradict these [errors], and to exert ourselves in keeping the church free from such errors”) that we as a consistory now stand in the way of. We also stand in the way of the command that God gives to Rev. Lanning to “contend” for the faith (Jude 1:3).
 - b. We know this by Rev. Lanning’s own confession when he asked us; “Please don’t interfere with this vow.” That comment, and so many others, were simply ignored by the consistory.
 - c. By this action we are telling Rev. Lanning to *not* “exert” himself and to *not* “contend” for the faith.
 - d. It is one thing for the consistory to not support Rev. Lanning as he shows himself to be “valiant for the faith” (Jer. 9:3), but we who are not willing to be valiant must not stand in the way of one who is.
 - e. One of the most important duties that Rev. Lanning has is to keep Byron Center PRC free from error. In his work as editor, Rev. Lanning is faithful in his calling to take heed “to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). Rev. Lanning knows the seriousness of what follows, namely that “grievous wolves” will enter in which will seek to destroy the flock. It is through his work as editor of *Sword & Shield* that Rev. Lanning is able, in a very powerful and unique way, to keep the sheep of BCPRC free from those wolves.
 - f. God will judge back-sliding Byron Center PRC as he judged back-sliding Israel if we will not repent of this decision (Jer. 3:12).
5. By adopting the decision, the consistory violates the 9th commandment of the law – “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor” (Ex. 20:16)
 - a. The motion implies, if it does not state (“at this time his focus must be on the preaching of the Word and care of the congregation”), that Rev. Lanning is not currently doing his work within the congregation. This is not true. The consistory has approved the pastor’s work at each consistory meeting when his work has been discussed. There has never been a motion, or a committee assigned to work with the pastor on any delinquency in his pastoral work. We as elders know how hard Rev. Lanning works. And now to take the extreme step to remove him from other work under the guise of performing additional pastoral work, *which the consistory has never before encouraged or advised him to do*, is to bear false witness against our pastor in the congregation (“that I avoid all sorts of lies and deceit as the proper works of the devil, unless I would bring down upon me the heavy wrath of God...also that I defend and promote, as much as I am able, the honor and good character of my neighbor” HC 43). The congregation will read this decision and believe that the pastor is not doing his work (“his focus must be on the preaching of the Word and care of his congregation”). The way of honesty would be to ask the pastor to do additional work, and then only after a period of time where he shows himself unwilling to do the work (which we know would never be the case with Rev. Lanning), would a discussion arise about freeing up more of his time. This never took place, and now simply to remove him as editor under the pretense of freeing up his time is dishonest and bears false witness against him.
 - b. This motion makes the consistory guilty of hypocrisy. Rev. Lanning does more pastoral work than the majority of the elders, in fact, there are verifiable instances where the elders have been delinquent in their work on very important matters. To now accuse Rev. Lanning publicly, either explicitly or implicitly, of not doing his work, is to make ourselves worthy of the rebuke of Jesus in Matthew 7:3–5:

“And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother’s eye.”

- c. These grounds do not represent the true mind of the consistory. This is seen in the fact that the grounds (and motion) do not at all reflect the discussion of the consistory the night this decision was taken. With God as our witness, the men in the consistory room did not discuss the impact of Rev. Lanning being editor or his need for more time to spend time visiting with the members individually. As Rev. Lanning told the consistory, he *has* the time to serve as editor. There was no elder who contested that. Overwhelmingly the discussion centered around opposition to *Sword & Shield* and opposition to Rev. Lanning’s writing in the magazine, *and even opposition to his preaching*. Representative were the following comments made by members of the consistory:
- i. There was no lie in our churches.
 - ii. All the magazine does is talk about the lie, the lie, the lie.
 - iii. When will all this talk about the lie stop?
 - iv. Rev. Lanning is seen as the leader of *Sword & Shield*.
 - v. This is just a stirring up of the people. This is just stirring the pot.
 - vi. Members of our congregation are not even reading the magazine.
 - vii. There are people who come to church and hear a sermon and do not want to come back to church again.

These were representative of the real reasons we took the decision we did, and now to officially adopt grounds that have the seemingly pious reason of freeing up Rev. Lanning’s time for more visiting with the people is nothing more than “all sorts of lies and deceit” (HC 43). And then to announce our decision to the congregation with the statement that we include the grounds “for transparency” is the very pinnacle of hypocrisy and gross deceit. God warns those who do not labor honestly in their work in the church: “Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord deceitfully” (Jer. 48:10). Brothers, we all know, but more importantly Jehovah God knows, what was said that night and the real reasons the vote was taken as it was. Brothers, God is not mocked. We must repent of this sin to Rev. Lanning, to our congregation, and to our God by overturning this grievous decision. “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Gal. 6:7).

Sincerely in Christ,

Dewey Engelsma