

## Protests-A. Lanning

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another without ever being able to find him. That's the truth too. We try to seek someone else other than Jesus Christ. We'll seek all day long, all our life long, and we'll never find one who can lead us unto the Father.

*There is only one way, for God well knew when he gave him to us, that we were sinners. God well knew, God understood, in fact, that's exactly why God gave to us a Savior; why God gave to us Jesus Christ, why God through the Word tonight points us unto him and says, "**He is the way, your way, unto me, through the truth which he works in your hearts, through a godly life** which, again, he works in you through the powerful proclamation of the truth." But he is the way. Trust in him with peace and comfort. Seek him. Believe in him. And above all, thank God for providing for us the way, the truth, and the life, Jesus, our Savior.*

Amen.

*Father, we thank thee for providing us a way unto thee so that even now at this very moment we can speak, eyes closed, hands clasped together, and know that we address thee and thou dost listen and hear as our mighty God and gracious Father, having forgiven us all of our sins in Jesus Christ, and having announced that unto us through the truth, and worked in us thankful loving obedience unto thee by our Lord Jesus Christ, who imparts all that he is unto us that we might live with him through our knowledge of the truth, and in that way, have communion with thee now and assurance that forever we shall have communion and fellowship with thee in thy house, our Father's house of many mansions.*

Amen.

## Protest of Rev. Andrew Lanning

April 14, 2017

Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches  
to convene June 13, 2017  
in Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church, Hudsonville, Michigan

Dear brethren,

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

I write to protest two of Synod 2016's decisions in the appeal of Mr. Neil Meyer (Acts of Synod 2016, pp. 48-51, Article 36, B, 2 and 3, and Article 37). The heart of the case was a sermon by Rev. Overway on John 14:6 entitled "The Way to the Father." I believe this sermon taught the false doctrine of a conditional covenant. In my judgment, synod did not adequately address the errors of the sermon, especially when synod

did not sustain the appeal of Mr. Meyer against the sermon. By failing to uphold Mr. Meyer's appeal, and by failing clearly to condemn the sermon's false doctrine, synod failed to maintain the truth of God's unconditional covenant of grace. Out of love for the truth of the covenant, and out of love for the Protestant Reformed Churches, I am compelled to protest.

#### **Legality**

Because I am a member of a sister church, there might be a question about the legality of my protest. Does an individual officebearer of a sister church have the right to protest the decisions of Protestant Reformed ecclesiastical assemblies? I suggest the following answer to this question.

It appears that members of sister churches do not automatically have the right to protest in the PRC. The Constitution of the Contact Committee does not list this as one of the implications of a full sister-church relationship. The Rules of Synod, in the section Explanation of the Rules for Protests, Appeals, and Overtures under II, A, 3, states: "It is understood, of course, that protests (appeals and overtures, too) may be made only by members of the church. One who has been excommunicated from or has left the churches loses his right of protest in them...."

Nevertheless, I believe that synod may grant an individual member of a sister church the provisional right to protest. This is implied by the Constitution of the Contact Committee, which describes the very close relationship in which members of sister churches stand to each other. Sister churches may receive each other's members to the Lord's Supper, transfer membership between each other's churches, and even call each other's ministers. Although individuals of a sister church are not members of the home church, they are received and treated as if they were members. This implies that the PRC could also receive a protest from an individual officebearer in a sister church as if that individual were a member of the PRC. In addition, the Rules of Synod state that synod shall consider the following matters: "Correspondence received from individuals or bodies outside our denomination or from bodies within our denomination other than ecclesiastical assemblies" and "All material from our sister churches" (Rules of Synod, VI, B, 3, e and f).

Therefore, I request that synod grant me the right of protest in this case, and declare my protest legally before synod.

#### **Grounds:**

1. The requirements of Articles 30 and 31 of the Church Order have been satisfied.
2. The Constitution of the Contact Committee requires mutual acknowledgment of each other's offices and mutual acknowledgement of each other's membership attests (Constitution of the Committee for

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Contact with Other Churches, V, B, 1 and 2). This good practice of treating individuals from sister churches as if they were members of the home church implies that synod could grant the right of protest to an officebearer from a sister church.

3. The Rules of Synod state that synod shall consider the following matters: "Correspondence received from individuals or bodies outside our denomination or from bodies within our denomination other than ecclesiastical assemblies" and "All material from our sister churches" (Rules of Synod, VI, B, 3, e and f). Although neither of these rules applies specifically to a protest from an outside individual, they do imply that synod would be within its rights to receive a protest from an individual from a sister church.

### Summary of the Case

The main material for this case is recorded in the 2016 Acts of Synod, pages. 45-56, Articles 36-39 and Supplement 2 pages 73-122.

The case revolves around Rev. Overway's sermon on John 14:6 entitled "The Way to the Father." John 14:6 reads, "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." In the sermon, Rev. Overway made three statements to which Mr. Meyer especially objected. These statements are (Acts 2016, Article 36 A, 1, a-c, p. 45):

1. "The way unto the Father includes obedience."
2. "The way of a holy life matters. It is the way unto the Father."
3. "...He is the way, your way unto Me, through the truth which He works in your hearts, through a godly life...."

Mr. Meyer appealed to synod to judge "whether the sermon teaches a conditional covenant" (Acts 2016, Supplement 2, p. 110). Synod made two decisions regarding this appeal (Acts, Article 36, B, 2 and 3, and Article 37, pp. 48-49). First, synod did "not sustain the appeal of Mr. Meyer when he contends that Rev. Overway's sermon on John 14:6 teaches a conditional covenant." Second, synod declared "that Hope's consistory erred in its wholesale defense of the sermon...." By these two decisions, synod implied that there was a problem with the sermon, but synod judged that the problem was not the false doctrine of a conditional covenant.

### Outline of the Protest

This is the overview of the protest, which will be developed afterward.

I. First Objection: I believe that synod erred in not sustaining the appeal of Mr. Neil Meyer, for the sermon does teach a conditional covenant, as Mr. Meyer contends.

A. Synod's decision not to sustain Mr. Meyer's appeal

- B. The fundamental error of the sermon: a wrong explanation of the place of man's works
- C. Demonstration of the sermon's fundamental error
  - 1. The sermon contradicts Jesus' doctrine that we come to the Father by Christ alone through faith alone.
  - 2. The sermon assigns our works a place of merit.
  - 3. The sermon contradicts the Belgic Confession, Article 26, on exactly the Bible text in question.
- D. How the sermon's fundamental error teaches a conditional covenant ✱
- E. The new threat to the PRC in this case: conditional experience of the covenant
- II. Second Objection: I believe that synod's criticism of the sermon was inadequate, because it failed to condemn the sermon's errors as false doctrine.
  - A. Synod's criticism of the sermon
  - B. The lack of a definite condemnation of the sermon
  - C. Synod's own criticism of the sermon demands a clear condemnation of the sermon
  - D. The necessity of clearly condemning the error as false doctrine
- III. Action Requested: That synod rescind two of Synod 2016's decisions and uphold the 2016 appeal of Mr. Neil Meyer.

First Objection (corresponding to synod's first decision: Acts, Art. 36, B, 2, pp. 48-49).

- I. I believe that synod erred in not sustaining the appeal of Mr. Meyer, for the sermon does teach a conditional covenant, as Mr. Meyer contended.
  - A. Mr. Meyer's appeal asked synod to judge "whether the sermon teaches a conditional covenant" (Acts, Supplement 2, p. 110). Synod judged that "the sermon does not teach a conditional covenant" and therefore synod did "not sustain the appeal of Mr. Meyer when he contends that Rev. Overway's sermon on John 14:6 teaches a conditional covenant." Synod had three grounds for this judgment:
    - 1. "[T]he sermon does not teach a conditional covenant." In support of this ground, synod explained: "From the sermon, it is clear that Rev. Overway's position on the covenant is not conditional," as the Protestant Reformed Churches understand a conditional covenant. Rev. Overway "preaches that our covenant fellowship with God does not depend on the fulfillment, by man, of the conditions, either of faith or obedience." Synod quoted several statements from the sermon to demonstrate this.
    - 2. "The specific statements to which Mr. Meyer objects were

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not stated to set forth conditions unto salvation.”

3. “The sermon as a whole does not teach that man’s obedience is a condition unto covenant fellowship with God, but rather that obedience is necessary for the experience of fellowship with the Father.”

B. I believe the sermon suffers from a fundamental error: It wrongly explains the place of man’s works. Reformed soteriology is clear about the place of man’s good works: they are the necessary fruit of faith. Good works are never the root, the cause, the reason, the foundation, the condition, the merit for our salvation. The root, cause, reason, and merit for our salvation is always Christ alone. Good works are always the fruit, the effect, the result, the consequence, the response to our salvation. Yes, good works are necessary fruits; inevitable responses; required results. But they are still fruits, never roots; still effects, never causes. When the sermon taught that man’s obedience and holy life are the way unto the Father, it took works from their proper place as an effect of coming to God and made them a cause.

C. Demonstration that the sermon wrongly explained the place of man’s works:

1. The sermon contradicts Jesus’ doctrine that we come to the Father by Christ alone through faith alone.

a. John 14:6 teaches Christ alone. That is, there is only one possible way to the Father, and this way is Christ alone. “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me.” Because Christ is the only way to the Father, no one else and nothing else may be introduced as also being the way to the Father. However, the sermon introduced man’s works as being the way to the Father. “The way unto the Father includes obedience.” “The way of a holy life matters. It is the way unto the Father.” “...He is the way, your way unto Me, through the truth which He works in your hearts, through a godly life....” By introducing man’s works as the way to the Father alongside Christ, the sermon denies that Christ alone is the way to the Father.

b. John 14:6 also teaches faith alone. That is, it is only by faith, not works, that man can come to the Father upon Christ the Way. It is true that man must come to the Father, as Jesus himself taught: “No man cometh unto the Father but by me.” However, man’s coming to the Father is by faith alone, not works. Man can never come to the Father by works, because man’s works are corrupt. Jesus’ works are the only pure works, and thus Christ is the only way to the

Father: "I am the way." Man can only come to the Father by faith on Christ the way, because faith is the renouncing of all our worth and works and trusting in Jesus' worth and work alone. Jesus teaches that faith is the only way to come to the Father by him when, in the immediate context, he speaks of the disciples knowing him (John 14:7, 9), seeing him (John 14:7, 8, 9), and believing him (John 14:10, 11, 12), all of which are activities of faith. Therefore, through faith alone we come to the Father by Christ alone. Thus also, there can be no such thing as coming to the Father by works. However, the sermon taught that man comes to the Father by man's works of obedience and a holy life, thereby denying that man comes to the Father by faith alone.

c. What role then do our works play? They are the fruit of coming to the Father by faith. They are the demonstration that the faith by which we came to the Father is true faith. They are the evidence that we are with the Father. But they are not the way to God. That way is Christ alone, through faith alone.

d. John 14:6 teaches that the way to the Father is Christ alone through faith alone. The sermon teaches that the way to the Father is Christ and man through faith and works.

2. The sermon assigns our works a place of merit.

a. The way of John 14:6 is a meritorious way. Because of man's sin, he has no natural right to come to the Father. The only way for fallen man to come to the Father is for someone to restore to man that right. That is, someone has to earn back that right for him, which man forfeited in his fall. Therefore, the way to the Father is the way of merit, the way of earning. No mere man can earn with God, but Christ can. The meritorious nature of the way is the theological reason why Christ alone can be the way to the Father. "No man cometh unto the Father but by me," because no man can earn this right for man except our Lord. Christ's obedience and atonement reopened the way to the Father for us, so that we can come to the Father through Christ's righteousness.

b. The sermon's teaching of merit becomes especially plain in light of synod's demonstration that there are two different uses of the word "way" in the Bible: the way of our conduct on the one hand and the way of access to God on the other. "Sometimes, in Scripture, the word 'way' refers to the conduct or 'way of life' of a person.... Other times,

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in Scripture, the 'way' refers specifically to how we have access to the Father, sometimes referred to as the objective basis of salvation, which is the person and work of Jesus Christ (Heb. 10:20)." Synod then showed that John 14:6 is describing the way of access to God, not the way of our conduct. "The Belgic Confession, Article 26, states clearly that the word 'way' in John 14:6 refers specifically to Jesus Christ, the Mediator, and not to the 'way' in which one walks."

c. It could be emphasized that these two ways are sharply distinct from each other. The way of access to the Father is the reason for our salvation, the cause of our salvation. The cause of our salvation is grace, not works (Eph. 2:8, 9). Therefore, the Bible says that we have access to God (Eph. 2:18) by the blood of Christ (Eph. 2:13), by his flesh (Eph. 2:15), by his cross (Eph. 2:16), and by his Spirit (Eph. 2:18). The Bible says that Jesus himself is the new and living way (Heb. 10:20), which we enter by the blood of Jesus (Heb. 10:19) and through his flesh (Heb. 10:20), and on which we draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith (Heb. 10:22). The Bible says that Jesus is the door (John 10:9), and men who enter the pasture by him are saved. And who are they who enter by this way that is Jesus the door? The elect sheep, given by the Father to Jesus (John 10:29), to whom Jesus gives faith (John 10:26, 27) and eternal life (John 10:28). Therefore, this way of access to God strictly excludes man's good works. Access to God is by God's grace and Christ's blood, not in any sense by man's works.

d. The other way, the way of our conduct, is the result of being given access to God, the fruit of being saved by grace through faith without works. The result of being saved is that we do good works. Therefore, the Bible says that we enter into his gates with thanksgiving (Ps. 100:4). We walk in love (Eph. 5:2), which is the more excellent way among many other good works (I Cor. 12:31). We walk after his commandments (II John 6), and walk in the law of Jehovah (Ps. 119:1) and in the way of his statutes (Ps. 119:32). The young man cleanses his way (Ps. 119:9) and rejoices in the way of God's testimonies (Ps. 119:14). Therefore, this way of conduct includes man's good works as the fruit and result of being saved by grace without works.

e. These two ways, then, are sharply distinct from each

other. The way of access is the reason for salvation; the way of conduct is the result of salvation. The way of access is the cause of salvation; the way of conduct is the consequence of salvation. The way of access strictly excludes man's works; the way of conduct includes man's works. These two ways are also related, for the way of conduct will always follow from the way of access. Nevertheless, they remain distinct. The way of access is not the way of conduct, and the way of conduct is not the way of access.

f. The sermon assigned man's works to that meritorious way of John 14:6. "The way unto the Father includes obedience," etc. Because the very nature of the way in John 14:6 is meritorious, man's works may not be introduced as any part of that way. By introducing man's works in this meritorious way, the sermon taught that man can merit with God.

3. The sermon contradicts the Belgic Confession, Article 26, on exactly the Bible text in question.

a. Article 26 of the Belgic Confession provides the authoritative Reformed interpretation of John 14:6 when it says, "What more can be required, since Christ Himself saith: I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me? To what purpose should we then seek another advocate? Let us not forsake Him to take another, or rather to seek after another, without ever being able to find him; for God well knew, when He gave Him to us, that we were sinners."

b. According to the Belgic Confession, it is illegitimate to require anything more than Christ in coming to the Father, since Christ is the only way. In fact, one who seeks any other advocate before God, including one's own self and one's own works, is guilty of forsaking Christ to take another.

c. The sermon violated the Belgic Confession's doctrine by teaching that our obedience and holy life is the way to the Father. Thus, the sermon requires more than Christ in coming to the Father, in flat contradiction to the Belgic Confession's demand, "What more can be required?"

D. The sermon's fundamental error of wrongly teaching the place of works in John 14:6 can properly be called the teaching of a conditional covenant.

1. John 14:6 is a passage about the covenant. Coming to the Father is covenantal activity, for man enjoys covenant fellowship



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and communion with the Father. This was the explicit teaching of the sermon as well: "Centrally that's what Jesus is referring to, referring to covenant communion with God the Father. Family fellowship. That's why He uses the word 'Father.'" "Covenant communion and fellowship with God. Jesus says I am the way to that fellowship" (Rev. Overway's sermon on John 14:6, "The Way to the Father").

2. If man's obedience and holy life is included in the way unto the Father's fellowship, as the sermon taught, then man's work is necessarily a condition and a prerequisite of that fellowship. The true place of man's works in the covenant is that they are the result of the covenant, the response to God's covenant mercy, the fruit of God's covenant work. The sermon wrongly makes man's works something other than the result of covenant fellowship with God: it makes man's works the way unto covenant fellowship with God. "The way of a holy life matters. It is the way unto the Father." Taking works from the place of man's grateful response and making them the meritorious way means that those works must function as conditions. As Mr. Meyer rightly contended from the beginning, to teach the place of man's obedience in the covenant wrongly is to teach a conditional covenant. "By teaching that the way unto covenant communion with God is man's obedience and holiness, the covenant is made conditional" (Acts, Supplement 2, p. 73).

3. Synod asserted, "The specific statements to which Mr. Meyer objects were not stated to set forth conditions unto salvation." However, I believe this assertion misses the point. The point is not whether these statements were intended to set forth conditions, but whether these statements accurately teach the place of man's works in the covenant. If the place of man's works in the covenant is wrongly taught, then the sermon teaches a conditional covenant.

E. I believe that this case introduces a new threat to the Protestant Reformed doctrine of the covenant. The new threat is to make man's conscious experience of covenant fellowship conditional upon man's obedience. The question in this case is not merely how man obtains the covenant objectively, but how he obtains the covenant subjectively. Does man obtain the right to covenant fellowship with God through Christ, but the experience of covenant fellowship through works? The truth is that, both objectively and subjectively, man obtains the covenant by Christ alone, not by man's works. I believe the sermon taught that works are the subjective way unto the Father, that works gain for man the experience of Father's fellowship. ★

1. There is a close relationship between man's obedience and man's experience of covenant fellowship with God. As man lives in obedience, he experiences fellowship with God. As man lives in disobedience, he experiences God's displeasure.

a. The relationship between works and experience is not that our obedience causes, gains, gets, secures, or obtains the experience of fellowship with God. Our works can never gain anything from God, including the experience of his covenant fellowship, because we are unprofitable servants, and we have only done that which was our duty to do (Luke 17:10). If our works gain anything from God, including the experience of covenant fellowship, then our works are meritorious, they are conditions, they are prerequisites. ★

b. Rather, the key to the experience of covenant fellowship is not works, but faith. It is by faith that we experience covenant fellowship with God. As we walk in faith—believing in Jesus Christ, seeking and obtaining remission in the blood of the Mediator—we “experience the favor of a reconciled God” (Canons of Dordt, V, A, 7). It is by faith that “the obedience of Christ...becomes ours,” which is “sufficient to cover all our iniquities and to give us confidence in approaching to God” (Belgic Confession, Article 23). These quotations from the confessions show that the experience of covenant fellowship with God is by faith. Our experience of covenant fellowship is by faith because faith holds to Jesus Christ, in whom all our salvation is found. Through faith we are united to Jesus Christ, experiencing and enjoying that union, and receiving all of the blessings of salvation.

c. Our works have a role in this covenant experience only as the fruit of faith. The faith by which we experience God's fellowship always produces good works as the fruit, effect, and result. This is an important and necessary role for good works. They serve as the proofs, demonstrations, and confirmations of our faith. The child of God beholds his obedience with joy, for his obedience is the testimony that God has given him a true faith. His obedience confirms that God truly is his Friend and that God truly has incorporated him into his fellowship by faith. As the Heidelberg Catechism says, good works are necessary so “that every one may be assured in himself of his faith by the fruits thereof” (Lord's Day 32, Q/A 86). However, as important as this role is for obedience, it is a limited role. Obedience does not cause

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the experience, but confirms it.

d. Because of the close connection between faith and obedience, there is also a close connection between obedience and the experience of covenant fellowship. Because faith and works always go together, works and experience always go together. If we are walking in obedience, it is because our faith is strong by God's grace, and we enjoy close communion with God. If we are walking in disobedience, it is because our faith is weak, and we "lose the sense of God's favor for a time" (Canons, V, A, 6). Obedience does not get us the experience of fellowship with God, but obedience always blossoms from faith, by which we experience fellowship with God. Therefore, in the way of obedience we experience covenant fellowship with the Father, because obedience is the sure fruit of faith.

2. The sermon, in its first point, dealt with obtaining the covenant objectively. In this point, there were many good statements that the covenant is unconditional. Synod highlighted this good teaching of the sermon when it said, "From the sermon, it is clear that Rev. Overway's position on the covenant is not conditional. He preaches that our covenant fellowship with God does not depend on the fulfillment, by man, of the conditions, either of faith or obedience" (Acts 2016, Art. 36, B, 2, a, 2), p. 48).

3. However, in its second point, the sermon turned to the idea of man's conscious experience of covenant fellowship with God: "[It] becomes evident that Jesus is saying I am the way unto the Father that you can consciously enter into communion with the Father." "But especially His focus is: you need to come into the Father's presence consciously." "But I am the way so that you can come unto the Father and know Him and rejoice in His fellowship, consciously and with awareness" (Rev. Overway's sermon on John 14:6, "The Way to the Father"). It was in this context of covenant experience that the sermon stated that man's obedience is the way unto the Father.

4. That the idea of conditional experience is a real threat to the Protestant Reformed Churches is evident from the fact that three ecclesiastical assemblies defended the doctrine of the sermon, and all three assemblies defended the sermon on the basis of man's experience.

a. This is not to say that the assemblies themselves made false statements about the relationship between man's obedience and man's experience; but it is to say that the

assemblies appealed to man's experience in order to justify the sermon's false statements.

1) Hope's Consistory defended the sermon by saying, "[T]he sermon... does not teach that our obedience merits with God, but it does correctly teach that in the way of obedience we experience fellowship with the Father" (Acts, Supplement 2, p. 107).

2) Classis East defended the sermon by saying, "[T]he statements... teach that man's obedience is the way to experience fellowship with the Father" and that "in the context of the statements to which (Mr. Meyer) objects, Rev. Overway was speaking of 'the way' as the way of experiencing God's fellowship and not the way of obtaining or meriting that fellowship" (Acts, Art. 36, A, 3, b, p. 48).

3) Synod defended the sermon by saying, "The sermon as a whole does not teach that man's obedience is a condition unto covenant fellowship with God, but rather that obedience is necessary for the experience of fellowship with the Father" (Acts, Art. 36, B, 2, c, p. 49).

b. The assemblies correctly noted that there is a relationship between our obedience and our experience. For example, "In the way of obedience we experience fellowship with the Father." However, I believe the assemblies are incorrect to assert that this proper relationship is what the sermon was teaching. The sermon itself did not claim to be teaching "the way of obedience," but was explicitly teaching "the way unto the Father."

c. The assemblies' appeal to man's experience of covenant fellowship to justify the sermon is alarming. I believe the sermon taught meritorious works in the covenant. If that teaching is allowed to stand in the Protestant Reformed Churches under the guise of man's experience, then conditionality has found an avenue into the Protestant Reformed doctrine of the covenant.

5. In his appeal to synod, Mr. Meyer correctly identified this new threat: "At issue is the experience of our covenant communion with God. Do we come to the Father in the way of our obedience and holy, godly life, or do we come to the Father in the way of faith alone in Christ alone apart from any of our works?" Mr. Meyer answered his own question: "To teach that our obedience

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is the way [to experience covenant fellowship with the Father], I believe, is to add to the work of Christ, which addition can only be a condition to our experience. Rather, I believe our obedience is the sure fruit, the fruit of gratitude as it comes forth from the covenant bond and fellowship that God has established and maintains in Jesus Christ alone with all His own" (Acts, Supplement 2, pp. 109 and 122). Mr. Meyer understood that the new threat to the PRC was the teaching of a conditional covenant from the point of view of man's experience. I believe that synod should also recognize this threat, and uphold Mr. Meyer's appeal. In this way, synod will maintain the truth of the unconditional covenant of grace, both objectively and subjectively.

Second Objection (corresponding to synod's second decision: Acts, Art. 36, B, 3 and Art. 37, pp. 49-51).

II. I believe that synod's criticism of the sermon was inadequate, because it failed to condemn the sermon's errors as false doctrine.

A. Even though synod did not sustain Mr. Meyer's appeal, synod did acknowledge that there were problems with the sermon, and therefore it declared "that Hope's consistory erred in its wholesale defense of the sermon...." Synod identified the following three errors in the sermon and in Hope consistory's defense of the sermon:

1. "The sermon does contain statements concerning the 'way' to the Father that are confusing and apparently contradictory."
2. "The sermon does not recognize the different uses of the word 'way' in Scripture and Reformed theology."
3. "In its defense of the sermon, the consistory also does not discern these two uses of the word 'way.'"

B. However, synod never explicitly condemned the sermon's errors as heresy or false doctrine.

1. Nowhere in the decisions of synod is there a definite decision that says the sermon was wrong. There is a decision that Mr. Meyer's appeal was wrong; there is a decision that Hope's consistory was wrong; but there is no decision that the sermon was wrong. Criticism of the sermon appears only in the grounds of the decision about Hope's consistory. Therefore, although synod did criticize the sermon, it never definitely took a position against the sermon.
2. Even where it does criticize the sermon, synod's language is mild. Synod's strongest statements against the sermon were limited to charges of "confusing and apparently contradictory" statements, and a failure to "recognize the

different uses of the word 'way.'" Furthermore, synod explicitly defended the doctrine of the sermon against Mr. Meyer's charge that it taught a conditional covenant. Thus, synod upheld the sermon's doctrine, and used only the mildest language to criticize the sermon's errors.

C. Synod's own criticisms of the sermon demand a clear condemnation of the sermon. Although synod's language was mild, I believe the actual content of the criticisms should have led synod strongly to repudiate the sermon.

1. The first criticism was that the sermon made statements that were "confusing and apparently contradictory."

a. Synod quoted from the sermon's first point, where the sermon correctly ruled out man's good works from the way to the Father. "Our own works cannot lead us unto the Father." "Nor is the way the way of our own worth. . . . It's not the way of my good works." Then synod quoted from the sermon's second point, where the sermon incorrectly claimed that man's good works are the way to the Father. "The way unto the Father includes obedience." "The way of a holy life matters. It is the way unto the Father." By these quotations, synod clearly demonstrated the sermon's confusion and contradiction regarding the place of works.

b. However, it is not enough merely to demonstrate that the sermon was confused regarding the place of works. The proper place of works is fundamental to the Reformed faith and the gospel. Contradiction on this issue undermines and denies the gospel, and therefore requires clear and decisive repudiation. I believe that synod's own demonstration of the sermon's confusion on this point requires that synod condemn the sermon.

2. The second and third criticisms were that the sermon and Hope's consistory did "not recognize the different uses of the word 'way' in Scripture and Reformed theology."

a. As discussed above, synod demonstrated that there are two different uses of the word "way" in the Bible: the way of our conduct on the one hand and the way of access to God on the other. As emphasized above, these two ways are sharply distinct from each other. The way of access is the cause of salvation; the way of conduct is the consequence of salvation.

b. Synod stated that the sermon did not recognize the difference between these two ways, and Hope's consistory

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did not discern these two ways. However, I do not believe that synod went far enough in merely pointing out this lack of recognition. To preach the way of conduct as if it were the way of access is to preach that man's works cause salvation! Therefore, I believe synod should not have stopped at criticism, but should have definitely condemned the sermon as teaching false doctrine.

3. In the second criticism, synod showed that the sermon contradicts the Belgic Confession, Article 26. Contradicting the Reformed confessions is serious false doctrine. Therefore, I do not believe that it was enough for synod merely to show that the sermon contradicted the Reformed confessions. In my opinion, synod should also have clearly condemned and repudiated the sermon.

D. I believe that, in light of the seriousness of the error and in light of synod's own grounds, it is necessary clearly and definitely to condemn the sermon as teaching false doctrine. Synod's response seems to leave it an open question what the problem really is with the sermon. Is the problem merely confusion? Is it apparent contradiction? Misunderstanding? Or is it the gravely serious problem of false doctrine? I believe that serious false doctrine has been taught in a Protestant Reformed sermon. This doctrine has now been defended by three Protestant Reformed ecclesiastical assemblies. I am convinced that synod's current response is inadequate to root the error out of the PRC, and gives cover for the error to spread. As it stands, I do not believe that synod has adequately defended the truth of the unconditional covenant against error. I believe that the only way properly to address this is for synod clearly and definitely to repudiate the sermon as teaching false doctrine. In this way, the PRC will maintain and defend the truth of the unconditional covenant of grace.

### **Action Requested**

III. On the grounds of the two objections above, I request:

- A. That synod rescind the following decisions and their grounds: Acts of Synod 2016, Article 36, B, 2 and 3, and Article 37 (pp. 48-51).
- B. That synod uphold the 2016 appeal of Mr. Neil Meyer.

May God bless the labors of synod and give wisdom to his servants as you deliberate these matters.

Warmly in Christ,  
Rev. Andy Lanning