

February 14, 2020

Dear Byron Center PRC Consistory,

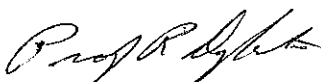
Attached is a letter we drafted (with great sorrow) to send to you concerning the conduct of your pastor. We decided that, before we sent it to you, we would send it to Rev Lanning with a cover letter explaining our actions. We did this with the hope that he would see his error and repent. (Our cover letter to him, dated Feb. 4, which he received on Feb 8, is also attached). Instead of pondering our letter, Rev. Lanning informed us (by e-mail, Monday, Feb. 10) that he was not going to keep it between him and us, but was going to speak to you about it before responding to us.

This action on his part renders ineffectual our attempt to keep matters between him and us. Thus, we send this charge of sin against him to you, in order that you deal with it directly. For the same reason, we are no longer asking him to respond. He compels us to make our case with you.

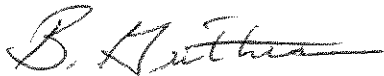
We take this opportunity to emphasize to you that our charges are not objections to anyone addressing the RFPA with objections about how the organization operates (which anyone may freely do), but with the *schismatic activities of a minister leading a large group to make slanderous accusations against ministers of the gospel.*

May God show you and your pastor the error of his ways, bring him to repent, and grant peace to the churches. God may grant that peace, but He cannot when concerned members deal with their concerns in unbiblical ways. We have evidence that these concerned members are active in their divisive conduct, and repeat our willingness to talk to you personally if you will.

In Christ's service,



Prof. R. Dykstra



Prof. B. Gritters



Rev. K. Koole

To: Rev. Andrew Lanning
1947 84th St.
Byron Center, MI 49315

COPY

Dear Brother Lanning,

February 4, 2020

Attached to this letter is a letter that we, editors of the *Standard Bearer* and your colleagues in the ministry, have prepared to send to your consistory.

Before we send it to them, however, we give you an opportunity seriously to consider its contents and repent of the wrongs that you are engaged in with the group that you lead—the group that sent to us the letter of May 23, 2019.

You are involved in gross misrepresentation, slander, and schism, which the letter to your consistory describes. The seriousness of the sin is aggravated by the fact that you are leading other officebearers in it—other ministers, elders, and at least one deacon.

We believe that we would be permitted to address your consistory directly without going first to you privately, since your conduct involves a large group of people and thus is quite public. But because of the utter seriousness of the matter—your conduct as a minister of the gospel—we address you privately first. By this, we are doing in love for you what we judge you ought to be doing in love for the truth and for us: address error in the biblical manner, and not the manner in which you have been engaged.

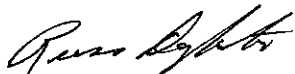
Our prayer, brother, is that you see the error of your way and turn from it. A turning would involve a ceasing and desisting, but also an urging of all the others involved in the group to cease what they do, for the honor of Christ's name and the good of Zion.

If, in two weeks, we do not hear from you that you are turning from this way, we will be addressing your consistory with the letter you now have in your possession.

We emphasize here that this letter and its subject is between us and you alone.

May God spare you and the churches from the consequences to which such a path will lead.

Your brothers in Christ,


Russell Dykstra


Barry Gritters


Kenneth Koole

Feb 13, 2020

Dear Brethren of Byron Center PRC Consistory,

With heavy hearts the undersigned co-editors of the *Standard Bearer* and ministers of the gospel in the PRCA write to you this letter regarding the involvement of your pastor with a group of men who have been and are engaging in activity that can only be described both as slanderous and as schismatic.

It is the gravity of those offenses that occasions the grief with which this letter is written. But we are convinced that what we say must be said. In what follows we will demonstrate the truth of that.

Among the above-mentioned activities of which we spoke is the writing of group letters. We bring to your attention here particularly a letter dated May 23, 2019, entitled "Letter of Concern to the Editors of the *Standard Bearer*," over the signatures of 20 men from various of our churches in the Grand Rapids area and beyond. This letter was sent by Priority Mail to each of the editors.

At the top of the list of 20 signatures are the names of three *pastors in our churches*, one of whom, it grieves us to say, is Rev. Andrew Lanning.

Before detailing the contents of that letter, we explain why so serious a matter, relating to a letter written in May of 2019, is not brought to your attention until February of 2020. In retrospect, we regret the delay because, left unaddressed, the activities in question have only worsened. The group has grown in number, which means that the defaming of the editors is spreading. Why, then, the delay? The letter from the group of 20 back in May of 2019 was an expression of their concerns. The group informed us that a similar letter was being sent to the RFPA board requesting *action*. Anticipating a relatively quick response by the RFPA, we decided to wait to take action. As it turns out, as far as we are aware, the RFPA has not taken action. Therefore, we address the issue with you now, some 8 months after we received the May 23 letter.

In the May 23 letter, the group expresses multiple concerns, some of which might be considered non-ecclesiastical in nature. We will, however, state them here, to make you aware of the group's accusations regarding the *Standard Bearer* editors.

"During your tenure as editors," they write, "you have not upheld the history, character, and standards of the magazine.

"First, the editors have taken the magazine in a direction that is not in keeping with its character as sharply Protestant Reformed, doctrinal, and polemical. The editorials develop virtually no doctrine and the tone is weak. This is reflected by force of editorial leadership throughout the magazine. Pursuing this direction the editors have eroded the historically polemical character of the magazine. The present day character of the magazine is one that we do not believe is simply the result of different men with different abilities and interests, but the result of a conscious decision to stamp the magazine with another character and take it in a different direction.

“Second,” they continue, “the editors threaten the freedom of the magazine and thus its historic position as a magazine that invited criticism and debate for the sake of the truth. Writing in the *SB* has been censored by the editors and letters attempting to discuss the doctrinal issues of the day rejected, unreasonably delayed, or held hostage by demands to change the content of the letters.... These things indicate to us that you do not value the magazine’s principle and history of freedom, but rather undermine it. They show to us that you do not value the magazine’s history as a forum of vigorous debate on the issues of the day for the benefit of the readers and the churches, but rather view debate as a threat.”

Then the 20 go on to address a Relationship Policy adopted jointly by the RFPA board and the Editorial Staff of the *SB*.

“Third, we also have a serious problem with the relationship between the *SB* and the RFPA, the organization that owns, publishes, and ultimately has the final say over all content of the magazine. We seriously disagree with the adopted policy that purports to establish the relationship between the *SB* and the RFPA.... That document fundamentally alters the relationship between the RFPA and *SB* that existed since the paper’s founding.”

All three of these concerns can be shown to be false. The third, in fact, has been asserted more than once and has repeatedly been demonstrated to be false. But all of them are gross misrepresentation. Thus, although these matters may not be ecclesiastical and are not our main object in addressing you, they are a serious concern to us because most of the signatories have, already in this, joined in condemning men rashly and unheard (H.C., L.D. 43), having not themselves investigated the matter but simply signed on to the defamation, encouraged to do so by the instigators. PRC ministers join others to sign such a letter.

But it is the *fourth* professed concern of the group that we find particularly disturbing. And we trust you will too. The group adds:

“Each one of these [previous three] problems all by itself is serious. However, they become intolerable and compel us to write to you when they are combined with the stance of the *SB* under your leadership in the most recent issues and troubles in our churches.”

We note here that, of the four pages of writing in their letter, more than half is devoted to this fourth concern. This one is indeed their main grievance. And it is our main concern.

“First,” they write, “when the PRC were going through a doctrinal controversy over the place of works in salvation the editorial pages of the *SB* were silent...the magazine was painfully silent and thus derelict in its duty.... When the controversy finally was settled at the broadest ecclesiastical gathering of the Protestant Reformed Churches without any help from the *SB*, when synod identified the trouble as a compromise of justification and the unconditional covenant, and when at that point there was an opportunity for the *SB* editors to inform and instruct on the issues just faced by the churches and their seriousness, the editorial pages of the *SB* were bold to minimize the threat to the churches and to issue a threat against all who were inclined to take the doctrinal threat seriously.”

“Second, soon afterward editorials appeared condemning a new species of antinomianism that was allegedly a danger in the PRC. The recent controversy in our churches also went seriously wrong by the introduction of an invented antinomianism. Not only did it hinder the

condemnation of erroneous statements in the preaching, but in the process the doctrine of grace in its criticism of those false statements was declared antinomian. Now this approach is being perpetuated on the pages of the *SB*.

“Third, following this approach the editors of the *SB* instigated criticism of the doctrine of Rev. Herman Hoeksema as maintained through the doctrinal split of 1953.”

Finally, with reference to the response in the *SB* to a writer who had, in a letter to the editor, referred to a line in a particular sermon of H.H., the group writes this:

“The theology of Herman Hoeksema as it was preached in that sermon is now viewed as a danger to the PRC and those that espouse it are considered hyper-Calvinistic and antinomian. Rev. Hoeksema and Hoeksema’s theology now is criticized in the paper he founded.

“For the first time in its illustrious history the *SB* was shamefully silent in a serious doctrinal controversy in the PRC over the very heart of the gospel. Now having found a voice the editors of the *SB* are using the *SB* as a platform to call the doctrine of Herman Hoeksema dangerous and those that espouse and maintain that doctrine antinomian and hyper-Calvinistic, the very charges that this denomination and that paper have endured through the decades for their stand for the truth.

“This stance of the magazine we find unacceptable. The editors’ treatment of Hoeksema’s theology and those that support it shows how far the magazine under your leadership has departed from its historic stance. We see it as the end result of the previous direction set by editors and, indeed, its fruit.”

There is the heart of our concern. The editors of the *Standard Bearer* are charged with opposing the theology of Herman Hoeksema, specifically the doctrine of the unconditional covenant. The unconditional covenant is the heart of PRC doctrine. To oppose that is necessarily to promote the false doctrine of a conditional covenant.

Three things are especially disturbing. First, there is the matter of Biblical and Reformed procedure when dealing with possible propagation of false doctrine by a minister in our churches. The Scripture and our Church Order show the proper procedure. A group letter to the RFPA demanding action is not the way. A genuine concern for the maintenance of *truth* under attack brings one to the assemblies of the *church*. A genuine concern for erring *brothers* will seek to correct them, not by gathering a group that brings slander to the RFPA, but by bringing charges to the brothers and to their consistories. The importance of this is heightened by the reality that, in *this* case, two of those charged not only preach in the pulpits of the churches in our denomination but also give instruction to its future ministers. How much is at stake here! Error cannot be properly addressed, and may not be addressed, by seeking to control the words they put on the pages of a magazine. When the *truth* is at stake, there is a biblical, ecclesiastical procedure—consistory, classis, synod. And it involves a charge of heresy, suspension, and, absent repentance, deposition. Not to proceed in this way, when error exists, is sin against Christ’s church. Besides, the RFPA has no ability to root out false doctrine in the PRC.

The second disturbing factor is the collusion. That is, a secret group of PRC members was formed to declare such things about ministers to an organization of more PRC members (the RFPA). An attempt was made to enlist others in the cause in order, as we suppose, to maximize the pressure on

the editors and on the board. Brothers, this must be called what it is—a sowing of *discord* in the churches (Prov. 6:19; see the Form for the Lord's Supper).

Third, involved in that collusion is the spreading of suspicion and distrust toward three ministers of the gospel in our churches. It is “spreading” suspicion and distrust by that same enlisting of others to the cause. Rather than defending and promoting as much as they are able the honor and good character of their neighbor (H.C., L.D. 43), they undermine their reputation and question their very integrity as these leaders persuade others to join with them in their leveling of unproven charges. Again, brothers, this must be called what it is—*slander and raising discord*.

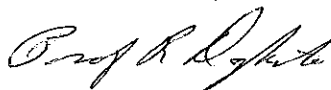
Rev. Lanning is a leader of this group.

Among the duties assigned to pastors in the form for their ordination is that they must keep the church of God in good discipline, “for they have the oversight of the house of God, wherein they are conversant, to the end that everything may be transacted in good order and decency,” which applies as surely to their labors in the denomination as it does in the congregation. Hardly are the three signatories at the head of the “Letter of Concern” doing that.

Please believe us, brothers, when we say again that it is with heavy hearts that we address you with these our concerns. We pray that you will recognize the gravity of this matter. We especially pray that you will understand that action must be taken by elders, whose responsibility it is to oversee the doctrine and walk of life of their pastor. Rev. Lanning should be brought to see that he must separate himself from that group and do whatever he can to counsel those over whom he has considerable influence to cease their divisive activities. If that does not happen, and if the group continues down its current path, what is already known by at least 40 men (and thus, arguably, already public) will very soon become known among the entire denomination. Thus, the actions of your pastor and his group will *unarguably* become *public schism*. May God graciously forbid this.

Please note that we are willing to meet with you about this if you so desire.

In Christ,



Prof. R. Dykstra



Prof. B. Gritters



Rev. K. Koole