

November 29, 2019

Dear Byron Center Consistory,

I am writing this letter to update you on my dealings with the *Standard Bearer* and the RFPA. I have two main concerns with the *Standard Bearer* which make it virtually impossible for me to write for the magazine, and which mean that I am ready to look for another publication to write for, or help to organize a new publication.

First, I do not believe that the *Standard Bearer* is a free magazine anymore, or that the RFPA is a truly free publishing association. For more than a year now it has required a long battle with the *SB* editors to get anything published. The result is that it is impossible from a practical point of view for me to write for the *Standard Bearer*, even when it is the *SB* or the RFPA Board that is requesting an article. I am simply not interested in fighting the *SB* editors for months at a time to get a single letter or article published.

Over the course of five months, from November 2018 to March 2019, it took many emails, phone calls, and meetings with the editors of the *SB* to get a letter from me published. This all took place while the editors were also refusing to publish letters from other Protestant Reformed ministers and members. I have attached a timeline of my interactions as Appendix 1.

On May 24, 2019, it was agreed that I would write two meditations for the upcoming volume year of the *Standard Bearer*. Around May 27, a letter that included my signature arrived to the editors and to the RFPA Board that expressed grave concern with the editorship of the *Standard Bearer*. On May 28, Prof. Dykstra informed me in a phone call that the three *SB* editors on their own had decided that I would no longer be writing the meditations for the *SB*. He would give me no reason, saying only that if I wanted to know why, I had to appear before the three editors at seminary. When I asked for this decision in writing, he refused to provide it. I decided to drop it.

Over the course of a year, and still ongoing, from December 2018 until today, the *SB* editors refuse to publish my book review of Rev. N. Langerak's commentary on I Corinthians. The RFPA Board itself asked me for this review. The editors maintain that Rev. Langerak's book militates against synodical decisions, and that my positive book review does as well. I have attached the book review and the correspondence with the editors as Appendix 2. At present, I have withdrawn the book review from the *SB* and from the RFPA and am looking for another place to publish it. The RFPA Board is aware of this and has been looking into it over their last two meetings.

11. My experiences with the editors are by no means unique. Other Protestant Reformed ministers and members also have been refused publication by the *SB* editors. In at least one case, this has been going on for years. The magazine is no longer free.

Second, the *Standard Bearer* has failed in its purpose to witness to the truth of sovereign, particular, unconditional grace. For years while the recent controversy in the PRC was unfolding at classis and synod, the *Standard Bearer* was silent. The only thing the *SB* had to say about the controversy over the heart of the gospel was a complaint that the protests and appeals coming to synod were too long. After Synod 2018, when the *SB* finally started to speak to the issues, it minimized them and threatened officebearers with deposition and members with excommunication if anyone would say that a compromise of justification by faith alone was heresy. Not long after, the October 1 editorial took the

PRC right back to the same error that Synod 2018 had just delivered us from by teaching that if a man would be saved, there is that which he must do. Members who wrote to the *SB* against that sentiment were slandered as sliding into antinomianism or hypercalvinism and of denying the full call of the gospel.

If the *Standard Bearer* will not bear the standard of the truth, then another publication must. I am not interested in writing for a magazine that undermines Protestant Reformed theology. I desire a magazine that is free to proclaim the clear trumpet sound of the gospel as the Protestant Reformed Churches have always loved it and defended it.

As you know, I have met twice this year with a group of some twenty or so men who are also concerned about the current direction of the *Standard Bearer*. It is likely that this group will meet soon for the third time, although no date has been set. Briefly, the group's work thus far has been this:

Our group first met on May 23, 2019. At the meeting, we discussed and signed two letters. The first letter was to the *SB* editors expressing our dissatisfaction with their editorship of the *SB*, especially their stance toward the controversy troubling the PRC. The second letter was to the RFPA Board laying out four main grievances.

"First, the editors have set a direction for the magazine that is not in keeping with its distinctive character as sharply Protestant Reformed, doctrinal, and polemical."

"Second, the freedom of the magazine is being taken away by the editors."

"Third, there are recent troubling developments on the editorial pages of the *SB*" with regard to the current controversy in the PRC.

"Fourth, we learned that the RFPA has given up control over the content of the magazine by means of an agreement that fundamentally alters the long-standing relationship between the RFPA and the *SB*."

The RFPA Board sent a letter dated July 27, 2019 asking for clarification on a few points. The group met again on August 22, 2019 to discuss and sign a letter providing the clarifications. The RFPA has not yet responded.

5. So far, when our group has met, I have urged caution and patience. I have been in favor of giving the editors and the RFPA Board every opportunity to handle this internally. However, when this group meets again, I intend to speak in favor of moving forward toward a new association and a new publication. Under the current editors, the *Standard Bearer* is muzzling the truth and promoting the same old error that Synod 2018 rejected. The RFPA Board apparently is unable to bring any resolution to this problem with its magazine. Likely, a new association and a new publication will not happen all at once. Probably there will need to be a few more steps taken first, including the calling of a special meeting of the RFPA Association to discuss these concerns. I am content to wait for these steps to take place, but I believe that a new association and publication is ultimately necessary.

I welcome your counsel on these matters.

The Lord's blessings on your labors for the cause of the truth and the unity of the church of Christ.

Warmly in Christ,
Rev. Lanning

APPENDIX 1 – 2018-2019 Timeline of A. Lanning’s Letter to the *Standard Bearer*

- October 1 Rev. Koole’s editorial “What must I do ...?” is published in the SB. In my judgment, the editorial promoted the same false doctrine that was condemned by Synod 2018. I considered sending a letter to the SB, but I heard that Rev. Vanderwal and Rev. N. Langerak were both writing letters. I decided to wait to see what they would write and what response the SB would have.
- October ? At some point in late October, the editors of the SB refused to publish Rev. N. Langerak’s letter as submitted.
- October 30 Rev. N. Langerak’s post “In Response to ‘What Must I Do?’ Editorial in the Standard Bearer” is published on the RFPB Blog.
- November ? At some point in early November, the editors of the SB refused to print Rev. Vanderwal’s letter as submitted.
- November 1 I tried to call Rev. Koole to discuss my own doctrinal objections to his editorial. I could not get through, so I emailed him instead, but had the wrong email address.
- November 2 I emailed Rev. Koole at his correct email address to lay out my concerns and propose a discussion between us.

Ken:

I tried to reach you by phone, but I'm not sure if I have your correct phone numbers. I hope everything has gone well with your move.

I wanted to discuss your editorial in the SB, entitled "What must I do...?" I agree with the main doctrinal point that you were making, that is, we regenerated men have the duty to obey God and the ability to obey God by virtue of the Holy Spirit's work in us. However, I have three concerns about the article that I would like to discuss with you when you have a chance.

1. It seems to me that the article makes faith merely another work of obedience, and does not distinguish faith as one thing and works of obedience as something else entirely.
2. It seems to me that the article makes the role of obedience to be unto salvation, rather than because of salvation.
3. It seems that you perceive some threat to the PRC that you are opposing by your article. It seems that you are warning us that in the controversy in the PRC, the danger is those who deny the regenerated believer's activity of obedience. **6** But I wonder where that threat is actually found in the PRC. My concern here is the same as Nathan Langerak's in his blog post, that the approach of the editorial perpetuates the confusion about what doctrine was actually at stake in the controversy. I list this last, however, because I am mainly concerned about the first two things I mentioned.

I am not trying to be confrontational with this email. I am asking in good faith for a discussion of these doctrinal points.

If you are OK discussing this over the phone, that is fine with me. (Home) 878-3255 or (cell) 269-286-3379. If you want to meet face to face I am fine with that too. Or if you have some other proposed way to discuss this, perhaps by email, I'm all ears.

Thanks Ken.

Warmly in Christ,
Andy

- November 6 Rev. Koole responded to set up a telephone meeting on the following day.
- November 7 Rev. Koole and I spoke about his editorial on the phone for about 30 minutes. Although our conversation was brotherly, we were in sharp disagreement. In the course of our conversation, my concerns about the editorial were confirmed. I was as fair-minded as I could be as I listened to Rev. Koole, but his view of works and my view of works were very different. Rev. Koole himself had the same evaluation of our positions. He told me that my teaching was very dangerous for the PRC. I had these specific concerns from our conversation:
- i) Regarding Peter's call to the men in Acts 2 to repent, Rev. Koole said that Peter was not denying the premise of their question, "What must we do?" but was affirming the premise of their question that they must indeed do something to be saved. While explaining this, Rev. Koole said, "We must repent for justification."
 - ii) Rev. Koole informed me that he also had a problem with my teaching. He referred to my sermon on Noah Building the Ark, and my explanation of Hebrews 11:7 that Noah was saved from God's wrath in the flood entirely by grace alone through faith alone. Rev. Koole asked me, "Who built the ark? Noah did, to the saving of his house." Rev. Koole went on to explain that this means that God graciously took into account what Noah did by faith and obedience to save Noah. He also said that one of the motives to obey God is that along the way of obedience we will experience justification and peace with God.
 - iii) Trying to understand what he meant, I asked Rev. Koole if anything that we receive depends upon our working. His immediate and vigorous response was, "Andy, Yes!" He referred to prayer as an example of our work to receive the Holy Spirit. He told me that I was afraid of good language like "depends" because it was so pregnant with meaning. He told me, "Fear of the language must not disable us from saying that you must do something to get something."
 - iv) I began to inform Rev. Koole about HH's sermon on the Philippian jailor. Rev. Koole immediately knew what I was talking about and cut me off, saying that he had a copy of that sermon. He told me, "Hoeksema was dead wrong in that sermon." This was another main point that convinced me that there is a sharp difference between Rev. Koole and myself. I take HH's sermon on the Philippian jailor to be the correct way that the unconditional covenant explains the call of the gospel.

- v) Rev. Koole informed me that the danger to our people is not false doctrine. Rather, the danger is that we have all our t's crossed and i's dotted, and the world comes in like a flood. Although he did not use the term, he was convinced the danger to us was not false doctrine, but was dead orthodoxy.
7. vi) Rev. Koole closed our conversation by insisting, "To inherit eternity, there is something you must do."

8. November 7 After speaking with Rev. Koole, I immediately called Prof. Dykstra to seek his advice about what I should do. I shared with him how troubled I was by the editorial, and that my conversation with Rev. Koole had only confirmed my concerns. I informed Prof. Dykstra that I was considering sending a letter, but that I wanted to give the SB the chance to handle this internally first. He appreciated this approach. Prof. Dykstra assured me that he would not rest until he had spoken to Rev. Koole to hear for himself, and that he would meet with Rev. Koole and respond to me by November 16.

November 12 Prof. Dykstra arranged a phone call with me. He informed me that he had not talked to Rev. Koole yet, but that he was sure that Rev. Koole and I were on the same page theologically. I responded that I hoped and prayed we were on the same page, but that I was completely opposed to the theology in the October 1 editorial. Prof. Dykstra said that it would be good for Rev. Koole and I to meet, with the other editors (Profs. Dykstra and Gritters) in attendance as well. I agreed to this, but said that I would like Prof. Dykstra to follow up with Rev. Koole himself first so that the SB could handle this internally.

November 15 Rev. Koole's response to Rev. N. Langerak, "A charge answered," is published in the SB.

November 17 Having not heard anymore from Prof. Dykstra, I called him to see if he had had a chance to speak with Rev. Koole yet. He had not yet spoken to him, but said again that it would be best to have a meeting between the editors and me. I informed him that I had no objection to this and was willing to meet, but that I still had an objection to the editorial. It appeared to me that the editors were not taking any steps to address the editorial themselves, but were instead treating my objections to the editorial as a misunderstanding. Nevertheless, I agreed that it would be good to meet. Prof. Dykstra and I were in agreement that I could still send a letter to the SB.

November 19 Because it appeared to me that the SB was not going to deal with my concerns internally, I began drafting a letter to the SB.

November 20 I finished the letter to the SB and sent it to a few colleagues for their comment and advice. I also sent a copy to Byron Center's Consistory for their review and discussion.

November 21 Prof. Dykstra sent an email to the SB editors and to me in order to arrange a meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to "come to a better understanding of each other's positions." I replied that I had already spoken to Rev. Koole and understood his position, and that I had already written a letter to the SB to be sent on the weekend. Nevertheless, I was willing to meet.

November 21 Byron Center's Consistory discussed the letter.

- November 24 Prof. Dykstra wrote an email suggesting that it was not Rev. Koole who had taken an erroneous position, but that I might be "changing longstanding Reformed positions and language." I replied that my position was "salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, with good works as the fruit," but that if he knew of specific instances where I had changed Reformed positions and language, to please let me know them so that I could consider them. Prof. Dykstra has never responded to this.
- November 24 Rev. Koole wrote an email to the editors and me saying that if I already had a letter written, there was little value in meeting now.
- November 24 Since it appeared that there would be no meeting, I officially submitted my letter to the *Standard Bearer* in an email to the three editors.
- November 27 Having heard nothing from any of the editors, and thinking that our last exchange called for some discussion, I called Prof. Dykstra to arrange a meeting with him.
- November 27 Elder _____ of Byron Center sent a letter to Byron Center's Consistory recommending that I "have a face to face meeting with Rev. Koole to see if they can come to a better understanding of each other."
- November 29 Prof. Dykstra and I met at seminary and had a cordial, brotherly meeting. We discussed the theology in the editorial for a bit, and related theological questions for a longer time. We also discussed my letter. Prof. Dykstra had two main objections to my letter. First, he thought that a letter of this sort would cause trouble in the PRC, because it would be a public statement that two PRC ministers disagreed with each other theologically. I replied that the letter was in no way schismatic, not in tone, in purpose, or in content. I also replied that, as far as I am concerned, synod settled the controversy in the PRC. The problem, however, is that the SB continues to undermine synod's decision by downplaying the seriousness of the false doctrines that were taught. The Oct. 1 editorial went even further by proposing the same false doctrine that synod had condemned, giving works a place and function they do not have in our salvation. The trouble, then, is not letters to the SB that call the SB to account, but the SB editorials in the first place. Prof. Dykstra suggested that I do a complete rewrite of the letter so that the letter would make suggestions rather than state objections. Prof. Dykstra's second concern was that I wrote to the "editors" and "the *Standard Bearer*," rather than to Rev. Koole alone. I replied that I had just assumed that letters about an editorial would be submitted to the editors. Prof. Dykstra said that the way I had phrased it would only inflame those who are already distrustful of the SB. We also discussed the possibility of a meeting with Rev. Koole so that he could explain his own thinking in the editorial. I replied again that this was a good idea and I could meet, but that the editorial as it already exists is the problem and must be addressed in the SB. Nevertheless, I readily agreed to meet to discuss these things more fully. Prof. Dykstra said that he would make arrangements for a meeting. I think it is ambiguous at this point whether my letter remains submitted to the SB or not.
- December 3 Having heard nothing from anyone, I emailed Rev. Koole to try to arrange a phone call and a meeting.

- December 4 Rev. Koole responded and we scheduled a meeting for Tuesday, December 11, at 9:30 AM at seminary. My plan for the meeting was to meet with the editors to hear their thoughts. I believe that I have given the editors every opportunity to deal with this internally. Although I am glad to meet and discuss these things, the editorial itself must still be addressed in the SB. Subsequently, the meeting was changed to December 12.
- December 12 The three editors (Dykstra, Koole, and Gritters) and I met at seminary to discuss the editorial and my letter. The meeting was cordial and was conducted in a brotherly spirit. The editors did not back down at all from the editorial but maintained that it was a proper explanation of the truth. We discussed the point whether faith is a good work. The editors maintained that the article did not make faith a work, but only recognized that it is an activity. I maintained that the way the article dealt with faith was still wrong, making salvation depend upon our activity. When I asked whether our salvation depends in any sense upon our works, Prof. Gritters repeatedly and enthusiastically denied that our salvation depends upon our works. On the other hand, Prof. Dykstra said that our works do not merit, but if the idea of "depend" only means that there is a connection between our obedience and our salvation, then it can be said that our salvation depends on our good works. Rev. Koole would not reject out of hand the idea that salvation depends on our good works, although he did not commit himself to that idea as vigorously as he did in our phone conversation. The editors said that my letter was as strong a throwing down the gauntlet as could be. That it was a direct challenge to the editors and to the SB and that it came across as a demand that the SB fly its flag over against my flag. The editors also warned that there was such a climate of suspicion and distrust in the churches that my letter would be inflammatory and throw things into more confusion. The editors further warned that my letter was really an open charge of sin, and more properly belonged before Rev. Koole's consistory. I was told that if I sent my letter to the SB, I would have to send another copy to Grandville's consistory and ask them to discipline their emeritus minister. Overall, the meeting was characterized by confusion and theological smoke and fog. The discussion kept jumping away from the actual editorial to other issues, such as whether repentance was part of faith or a work of faith, and whether the idea of "obedience unto salvation" was defined or not. I was questioned whether I agreed with synod. I was questioned about whether we will inevitably do good works as the work of Christ in us. The impression that was left with me was that the editors thought I was misunderstanding and misjudging the editorial because I contended that the editorial made faith a work. The editors also expressed their judgment that it was "unfortunate" that HH had explained the call of the gospel to believe to mean "nothing." At the conclusion of the meeting we thanked each other for meeting and shook hands. A brotherly spirit was still evident, but there was not unity of thought on the editorial. The editors impressed upon me that they wanted a letter and hoped I wrote a letter, which implied that they did not want this letter. I assured them in good faith that I would consider what they had said and that their words carried weight with me.
- December 19 After considering what the editors had said, and talking it over with some colleagues, I reread the editorial several times and realized that I had the exact same objections to it as I did before the meeting. However, I came to the conclusion that I needed to revise certain portions of the letter. The revised version sticks closer to the language of the

editorial so that my objection can be more clearly spelled out. The final draft of the letter is dated December 18, and was submitted to the editors via email on December 19.

- March 1 The SB (available to e-subscribers on Feb. 22) published my first letter, with part one of Rev. Koole's response. The letter that the SB printed was the first letter, not the revised second letter.
- February 22 I emailed Prof. Dykstra to inform him that the SB had published the wrong letter. He replied with apology that this must have been a mistake, that he didn't know about a second letter, and that he would check into it.
- February 25 I emailed Prof. Dykstra to ask him if he had any suggestions for how to handle this oversight.
- February 27 Prof. Dykstra replied that the only thing he could think of was to publish the revised letter on March 15 with an apology. I replied that his suggestion was good and thanked him for taking care of this.
- March 15 The SB (available to e-subscribers on March 11) published my revised letter, with a note and an apology for publishing the wrong letter March 1. The SB also carried part two of Rev. Koole's response.