

The PRCA: Our Apostatizing Sister Churches

Dear Session of CERC,

With this letter I hereby inform you that I no longer recognize our sister churches, the Protestant Reformed Churches in America (PRCA), as a faithful denomination. It is my judgment that the PRCA have shown indisputable evidence of losing the marks of the true church according to Article 29 of the Belgic Confession. Specifically, the PRCA have lost the “pure doctrine of the gospel” and “church discipline” in “punishing of sin.”

Background

2. I have been closely following the doctrinal controversy in the PRCA since it began in 2015. It is to our great shame that since the controversy began six years ago, we have kept awfully silent. Our duty as a sister church is to take heed to the life of our sister. That we have kept silent—in the face of vicious assaults on the truth that unites us—is a gross dereliction of duty as a sister church. The Lord has set watchmen upon the walls of Jerusalem, who “shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the LORD, keep not silence” (Isa. 62:6).

3. The implications of our silence towards the doctrinal controversy engulfing our sister church are severe. We are saying before God’s face that their doctrinal controversy does not concern us—and therefore we keep silent. We also teach our members that the doctrinal controversy—and therefore the lies—in our sister church has no bearing on us. God will judge us and our generations if we continue to keep silent.

The PRCA’s Doctrinal Controversy

4. The PRCA’s controversy is fundamentally heresy. What should have been a clear case of heresy was not dealt with as heresy. In 2015, the former minister of Hope PRC, Rev. David Overway, preached heretical statements that corrupted the gospel truth of justification by faith alone. His sermon on John 14:6 included the statements:

“The way unto the Father includes obedience.”

“The way of a holy life matters. It is the way unto the Father.”¹

5. To teach that the way to the Father is any way other than Jesus Christ alone is clear and simple heresy.

6. A faithful elder at Hope PRC, Mr. Neil Meyer, protested against these statements to the consistory, but was countercharged by the same consistory for being an antinomian, deposed, and placed under discipline for a multitude of sins. He filed appeals to multiple classes and synods, but it was not until Synod 2018 that he was finally exonerated and the false charges of sin and heresy lifted by Hope PRC. In the meantime, the minister of Hope PRC continued to preach heresy.²

¹ Acts of Synod, 2016, p. 73.

² For a full account of the PRCA’s controversy, read and study the PRCA’s Acts of Synod, 2016-2019.

7. On the basis of multiple sermons,³ Synod 2018 judged that the doctrinal error taught at Hope PRC “compromises the gospel of Jesus Christ...the perfect work of Christ is displaced.” Furthermore, “the doctrines of the unconditional covenant (fellowship with God) and justification by faith alone are compromised by this error.”⁴

8. A compromise of the gospel of Jesus Christ *is* heresy; to teach doctrines that displace the perfect work of Christ is heresy; to compromise the doctrines of the unconditional covenant and justification by faith alone is heresy. This is the irrefutable testimony of Scripture: “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8).

9. Today, the leadership of the PRCA still fails to condemn the false doctrines that were taught in Hope PRC, and that were defended by multiple assemblies, as heresy. Every effort was bent, and still continues to be bent, to defend the heresy taught at Hope PRC and to protect the heretic. Not a single effort was made to honor the faithful service of Mr. Neil Meyer to the churches on behalf of the truth.

The Standard Bearer

10. The *Standard Bearer* (SB), the voice of the PRCA, could have done much to help the denomination and especially Hope PRC fight against the heresy. Among the SB’s editorship are professors of theology whose office is to “vindicate sound doctrine against heresies and errors” (Church Order Article 18). Throughout the years of controversy, however, heresies and errors were vindicated against sound doctrine.

11. Instead of being a beacon of light to bear witness to the truth, the SB failed—utterly and inexcusably. Instead of explaining the heresy carefully and thoroughly, and then condemning it to the overthrow of the lie, the SB did the exact opposite. Instead of warning the members of the PRCA against the heresy in their midst, the SB minimized the heresy and protected the heretic. A notable example of this are quotes from the SB in 2018:

“The key point is that heresy is a deliberate deviation from or contradiction of fundamental teachings of Scripture as expressed in the confessions. In that light, then, synod spoke not of heresy—teaching that directly contradicted the confessions, or teaching that clearly deviated from the confessions.”⁵

“However, synod did not declare this error to be heresy. Synod did not state that this teaching denies the unconditional covenant or justification by faith alone...Let this be clear. Anyone who, from this date on, concerning the minister, consistory, committee to assist the consistory, or Classis East, anyone, I say, who alleges that those individuals or ecclesiastical bodies taught heresy, or justification by faith and works, or Federal Vision, or a conditional covenant, is guilty of slander. Such a one must be rebuked. Slander against officebearers, such serious slander, is the devil’s tool to divide the church of Jesus Christ. This is the sin of schism, a sin so serious that officebearers are deposed for it. And members excommunicated for it.”⁶

³ See Synod 2018’s judgment of these sermons in the Acts of Synod, 2018, p. 56-82.

⁴ Acts of Synod, 2018, p. 70.

⁵ The *Standard Bearer*, 2018, Vol. 95, p. 12.

⁶ The *Standard Bearer*, 2018, Vol. 94, p. 415.

12. Where the PRCA’s members needed to know what exactly the heresy was and how to condemn it, the SB minimized the heresy, protected the heretic, and misled the people.

13. So soon had Synod 2018 repudiated the false charge of antinomianism against Mr. Neil Meyer that the SB began informing its readers that antinomianism was the real issue in the PRCA. Compromise of the gospel of Jesus Christ, displacing the perfect work of Christ, compromise of justification by faith alone and of the unconditional covenant were not the real issues in the controversy, according to the SB. Those issues were ignored. Antinomianism—the false charge against Mr. Neil Meyer that took multiple Synods to repudiate—was the real issue, said the SB:

“And one of the large issues [of the controversy] was (and continues to be) “What is to be judged as antinomianism?””⁷

“If one does not think there have been those of an antinomian strain...in our churches over the years, and that this error remains a real and present danger, well, all I can say is, he does not know our church history and what a number of our congregations have had to deal with over the years.”⁸

14. The PRCA, already weakened by the failures of multiple assemblies to deal with the heresy in their midst, were further weakened by the confusion and misleading provided by the SB.

Sword & Shield

15. *Sword & Shield* has, since its beginnings, been the antithesis of the SB. It has done what the SB could not and would not do. Editorial after editorial in *Sword & Shield* has been devoted to explain and to uphold the doctrinal decisions of Synod 2018. *Sword & Shield* has exposed the false doctrine in the PRCA as heresy, explained and condemned the heresy on the basis of Scripture and the Reformed confessions. In love for her brethren, *Sword & Shield* has called the PRCA’s officebearers and members to repentance. For doing so the magazine and her editors have been slandered as schismatic and divisive.

16. Yet it is plainly evident to any honest reader of *Sword & Shield* that the magazine has sought only to promote the truth in all its publications. There is no other magazine—certainly not the SB—that has condemned the heresy like *Sword & Shield*. *Sword & Shield* takes seriously a compromise of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It takes seriously a displacing of the perfect work of Jesus Christ, and the compromise of justification by faith alone and of the unconditional covenant. *Sword & Shield* fights against these heresies according to the demand of Scripture. In doing so the magazine is not promoting division or confusion. It is providing critical instruction to condemn the lie in the PRCA and to preserve the truth.

⁷ The *Standard Bearer*, 2018, Vol. 95, p. 81.

⁸ The *Standard Bearer*, 2018, Vol. 95, p. 82.

Rev. Andy Lanning

17. Plainly revealing a mark of the false church in persecuting those who “live holily according to the Word of God, and rebuke her for her errors” (BC Article 29), Byron Center PRC recently deposed our former minister, Rev. Andy Lanning. As a member of CERC, I consider it exceedingly shameful that this is the way we treat our former minister after his years of faithful service in our congregation. We keep silent, and give our tacit approval, to his discipline and deposition from the gospel ministry. Is this the way CERC treats her ministers who labor faithfully in our midst? God help the next minister who ministers to us.

18. The narrative that the PRCA would like everyone to believe is that Rev. Lanning was righteously deposed for causing schism.⁹ He disobeyed his elders’ demand of him to resign as the editor of *Sword & Shield*. He preached sermons that rebuked a number of church assemblies and officebearers that taught, minimized and tolerated the heresy. He did not follow the “church orderly way” by bringing protests and appeals to the ecclesiastical assemblies.

19. It is my judgment that this narrative is false.¹⁰ What Byron Center’s consistory demanded of Rev. Lanning to do violates his calling as a minister. In demanding that he resign as the editor, the consistory was in effect telling Rev. Lanning that he may not write about Christ, may not teach Christ. In faithfulness to his office and to the vows he took, Rev. Lanning would not obey such a wicked demand. He continued preaching and writing against the heresy.

20. Rev. Lanning is no schismatic. Rev. Lanning preached truth and called the people to unity in the truth by condemning the heresy. Listen to his sermons;¹¹ read his writings in *Sword & Shield*. There is not one instance of his promotion of disunity and division *away from Christ*.

21. Byron Center’s consistory and the PRCA would not hear a godly rebuke from God’s prophet to repent of heresy. “They hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly” (Amos 5:10). Byron Center PRC put Rev. Lanning out; they slew God’s prophet; they committed ecclesiastical murder. Classis East sanctioned and approved of that murder. The denomination has taken upon itself the marks of the false church.

Action Requested

22. At this late stage in the PRCA’s controversy, I ask that the Session respond to these questions:

- a. What is the Session’s position on the PRCA’s doctrinal controversy?
- b. What is the Session’s position on Rev. Lanning’s deposition?

23. In view of the severe judgment that the PRCA are an apostatizing denomination, I request that the Session terminate our sister-church relationship with the PRCA, and seek a relationship with First Reformed Protestant Church.

⁹ For an official account, read the report of Classis East of January 2021, especially the document titled “Deposition Case.”

¹⁰ For an accurate account of what went on at Byron Center PRC, read and follow the blog of Dewey Engelsma, a former elder at Byron Center PRC (<https://astraitbetwixtwo.com>). His blog gives an account of what went on beyond the official reports.

¹¹ Rev. Lanning’s sermons can be accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCgDp15yLAihU4I2T2aJ2N0w>.

24. I pray that you will reach the same sobering conclusions and accept my requested action. If such is not the case, then I must conclude that you stand with, and approve of, the current state and actions of the PRCA. I must also conclude that you approve, by your silence, the heresies that are taught and tolerated in the PRCA. I will then wait for an appropriate time to be united with FRPC, where the true gospel of Jesus Christ is preached.

Blessings,
Aaron Lim