

March 5, 2021

Consistory of Crete Protestant Reformed Church
1777 East Richton Road
Crete, IL 60417

Dear Brothers,

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I write to protest your decision “to denounce as willful, hasty, sinful, and schismatic the actions of 2 elders and 3 deacons of Byron Center PRC wherein they called for separation from the Protestant Reformed churches.” My grounds are 1) the actions you denounce were not willful, hasty, sinful, and schismatic; and 2) the announcement to the congregation was not necessary.

It was not willful. To be willful is to reject knowledge and refuse to submit to the word of the Lord so that one refuses to hear reproof, rebuke, and exhortations. It is the calling of every minister of the word to preach against error as he is bound to do based on Article 55 of the Church Order: “To ward off false doctrines and errors that multiply exceedingly through heretical writings, the ministers and elders shall use the means of teaching, of refutation or warning, and of admonition, as well in the ministry of the Word as in Christian teaching and family-visiting.” Also, a minister is bound to “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:2). To be long suffering is to continue even in the face of opposition. Rev. Lanning did this faithfully. His preaching was not shown to be in error by his consistory, Classis East, or anyone else. The fact that many refused to hear it does not make it schismatic.

It was not hasty. The call for separation came with much urgency. The congregation was in distress because of the actions of the Byron Center PRC consistory and the actions of Classis East. They had observed four years of protests and appeals of errors to Classis East and Synod of the PRC, many of which were dismissed on technicalities or not upheld, until finally the truth was upheld by Synod 2018. In addition to this, their own protests to the Bryon Center PRC consistory against the suspension of their minister were ignored. Their consistory had lied to them when they based their insistence that Rev. Lanning stop writing for the *Sword & Shield* because he wasn’t doing justice to his pastoral labors. It was the experience of the congregation that he was a compassionate and hardworking pastor that was always there for them. They had lost confidence in their consistory and could not with good conscience send their children to catechism or have their infants baptized there.

On the other hand, the deposition of Rev. Lanning was hasty. It was not done decently and in good order. The Byron Center PRC consistory did not do their work with diligence as Christ called them to do: “he that ruleth, with diligence...” (Rom. 12:8). But rather handed oversight of Byron Center PRC to Classis East through the church visitors. The decision to depose came only two weeks after the decision to suspend. Article 79 of the Church Order implies the possibility that a minister, suspended by reason of public or gross sin, may be reinstated to the duties of his office by the lifting of the suspension. In *The Church Order Commentary* by Van Dellen and Monsma in the explanation of Article 79, it says:

“Suspension of Ministers will as a rule also require a period of three to six months. At the end of the period of suspension the two Consistories can lift the suspension and reinstate the Minister, or they can extend the period of suspension, or they may find that the Minister in question should be deposed, in which case the matter goes to Classis” (p. 327).

It was not sinful. I assume that the sin you refer to is that of schism and breaking the union of the body of Christ. True unity of the body of Christ is in the truth of God’s word. The officebearers who separated believed that the deposition of Rev. Lanning revealed that the PRC have corrupted the marks of the true church and manifest the marks of the false church. Their demonstration of this was based on the objection to sermons that supported the decision of Synod 2018 but were judged as schismatic and made Rev. Lanning worthy of deposition. The desire of Rev. Lanning and these officebearers was to maintain unity by pointing out the error that was condemned at Synod 2018 and to teach the truth over against that error.

Even though Article 31 of the Church Order allows for protest, it is not a requirement. If these officebearers believed it was necessary to separate, this is not wrong. Members of the PRCA who leave the denomination are not committing sin that must be repented of. We are called to unite ourselves to a church that has the purest manifestation of the truth. It is up to each member to decide this, without being charged with sin. Beside the error of a conditional covenant that is showing itself in our churches, the source of our good works is being denied as well as our total depravity. And calls to repentance are challenged as schismatic. When wrong ideas about these fundamental and historic truths of the reformed faith begin to show themselves in our churches, it would appear that the manifestation of the truth in the Protestant Reformed Churches is not as pure as it was in years past. This gives us cause for serious introspection.

On the other hand, what the Bryon Center PRC consistory did by insisting that Rev. Lanning stop writing for the *Sword & Shield* was wrong. This was based on untruthful grounds and went beyond what the consistory had a right to require. A consistory does not have absolute authority over its minister to dictate what he may or may not do during his personal time. Besides, the work of writing for *Sword & Shield* is in keeping with a minister’s vow to “not only reject all errors that militate against this doctrine, and particularly those which were condemned by the above mentioned synod, but that we are disposed to refute and contradict these, and to exert ourselves in keeping the church free from such errors” (Formula of Subscription). The Bryon Center PRC consistory was infringing on Rev. Lanning’s liberty and trying to bind his conscience, something only the Holy Spirit may and can do.

It was also wrong for Byron Center PRC consistory to suspend elders, make a decision to depose Rev. Lanning, and then reinstate the elders without reevaluating decisions made in their absence.

It was not schismatic. As I stated earlier, we are called to unite ourselves to a church that has the purest manifestation of the truth. It is up to each member to decide this, without being charged with sin. But the truth, as a two-edged sword, will always divide. And the Byron Center PRC consistory created division in its congregation by their improper actions.

The announcement itself was not necessary but showed an authoritarian spirit. What grieves us the most about this letter is that the work of the consistory is to rule in love, not to tell the flock what to think. That is the work of the Spirit through the preached word. And we are called to “try the spirits whether they are of God” (1 John 4:4). If you truly had a deep love and concern for the body of Christ, you would not have done this. Because of this, I protest your decision to make this announcement to the congregation.

My wife and I are so thankful for the faithful preaching we hear at Crete Protestant Reformed Church. We pray that our pastor continues to preach the truth boldly and without fear or favor of men, and that our consistory be given wisdom, discernment, and love for God’s people. I do agree with you that what happened are sad events. We pray that, according to God’s will, the breach in our denomination may be healed and that God does not take his truth from us.

Your brother in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bob Vermeer".

Bob Vermeer