

Dear Members of the Consistory of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church,

Brothers, I am sure you have an idea why I am here but let me elaborate on that first.

I here tonight regarding my Formula of Subscription vow. I took a vow that “We, the undersigned....deacons of the Protestant Reformed congregation of Byron Center, of Classis East, do hereby sincerely and in good conscience before the Lord, declare by this, our subscription, that we heartily believe and are persuaded that all the articles and points of doctrine, contained in the Confession and Catechism of the Reformed Churches, together with the explanation of some points of the aforesaid doctrine, made by the National Synod of Dordrecht, 1618-'19, do fully agree with the Word of God. We promise therefore diligently to teach and faithfully to defend the aforesaid doctrine, without either directly or indirectly contradicting the same, by our public preaching or writing,” (emphasis added). The reason for this meeting is because I believe that I am called by my oath to defend the doctrine that we as a Council have silenced in our decisions.

Prior to Classis East minutes being distributed, I could, in good conscience, say that while I disagreed with our decision to remove Rev Lanning from our pulpit and subsequently suspend him, I did not have all the information. Also, it was a decision in which I was not a part of the deliberations and voting. Therefore, it did not bind my conscience regarding my vow taken in the formula of subscription. So once again, while I had my right to personally disagree with your decision, it was one I needed to acquiesce to while I followed the proper steps of the church order.

Tonight, though, I come to you as an office-bearer in Christ’s Church, who took a vow to faithfully defend the aforesaid doctrine, and humbly ask you listen as I defend that doctrine. I am convicted in my heart, that the decision we have made to suspend Rev Lanning is contrary to the Word of God. I am convicted that Rev. Lanning’s sermons were the Word of God, and by suspending him based on the church order alone, and not judging the content of those sermons, we have silenced the Word of God.

So, to begin, I am going to go through the materials that we have distributed to Classis East starting at the beginning. This way I can illustrate my understanding of those decisions and documents. If you would allow, I would like to speak through all my thoughts to the end.

I say this now, to remind myself mostly, that I do not do this in a spirit of pride or anger. I do this in a spirit of love. I also humbly ask you men to listen in that same spirit. To have open ears and hearts to what I have to say. I humbly ask you to prayerfully consider what I lay out before you tonight.

So, for starters, let’s look to page 125-126 of the agenda. It is my understanding that Rev. Lanning was suspended because some content of his sermons was constituted as public schism. Am I correct? This is not a doctrinal issue for which we are suspending him?

First, then, I would like to establish with you that this is a doctrinal issue. This **MUST** be a doctrinal issue. The first thing to think about is the fact that these were sermons. What do we believe about the mystery of what happens behind the pulpit? We believe God uses that pulpit to preach unto us His very Word, and not the word of man (II Thes. 2:13-14). The Word of God **cannot** be schismatic. Therefore – the necessary implication of charging Rev Lanning with schism on account of those sermons, means they cannot be the Word of God, otherwise we have judged the Word of God as schismatic.

What is doctrine? Doctrine is this: Matthew 7:28, Matthew 16:12, John 7:16-18. Doctrine is teachings. Where are these teachings found? John 7 hits the heart of it. They are found in the Word of God – which we believe proceeds off our pulpit Sunday to Sunday. And, thus, we are called to judge

that sermon – whether it be of God, or whether Rev. Lanning spoke that of himself. How do we judge that sermon though? Do we hold it up to the church order? What does the Bible say to us about the Word of God, and how we judge the Word of God? II Timothy 3:16 gives us that answer.

And I caution us to you understand this truth. The Word of God **does** divide. Hebrews 4:12 shows us this. It is not schismatic when it divides because it cannot be sinful because it is the Word of God. It is a two-edged sword. When the Word of God comes with a call to repentance, the answer is either hardening or softening. If that sermon was the Word of God, and the church is being divided because of that, it is not a sinful schismatic activity that divides, but the very Word of God. Thus, that sermon must be judged whether it is the true Word of God or not, and therefore this is doctrinal. We must judge on the doctrine contained in that sermon.

Further I contend this is doctrinal, based on the way it has been laid out. Let us look at page 126, at the bottom under the church order authority section. We have defined the authority of the church order as a minor creed. I had my doubts about calling the church order a minor creed until I did my own reading. In the green book page 377 “the church order is called a minor confession. That does not mean it is of lesser importance, but rather that it is narrow in scope, and that it develops the practical implications of the truths of Scripture.” Okay, so I discovered I was wrong – it is a minor creed – but if we read on in that paragraph we find this: “Insofar as the church order sets forth the truths in scripture and in church government, it has the authority of a creed.” Okay so now we have the heart of this matter...the heart is not about whether or not the church order is a creed. That’s not what is important about the church order. The importance is that it sets forth the truths of Scripture. So, if Rev Lanning violated the church order, worthy of deposition, he must have violated the truths in Scripture that are set forth in the church order. Once again brothers – if Rev. Lanning violated the **teachings** of Scripture found in the church order this is doctrinal. It has to be doctrinal. I can’t be anything other than doctrinal, and we must understand it that way.

Okay so now that I hope we have established that this IS a doctrinal issue. Brothers, that is why I am before you, because I disagree with our decision. I believe we are walking a path that is not founded on the Scriptures. And as such, I hope to point out my views on this in order to fulfill my vow I took in the Formula of Subscription to defend the doctrines of Scripture. I am here to defend the doctrine that has been silenced by the decision we have taken as a church.

Now to my defense: I believe that in our zeal to defend the doctrines contained in the church order, we have chosen to ignore other doctrines contained in the church order. Therefore, by defending one doctrine in the church order by rejecting the others...as we have established, the church authority is derived from Scripture, therefore we have rejected sections of Scripture, to uphold other sections, in essence. I liken it to this: if you chose to read John 3:16 “for God so loved the world,” and want to establish that Christ died for all men as the truth, you could find a variety of passages to defend your view, but in doing so you would reject the multitude of passages that disagree with that view. In order to find the Truth you have to deal with the passages in Scripture that appear to go against your view, and establish how something is in harmony with all of Scripture, not merely one to two, or even many passages, but all of Scripture.

With that in view I have picked a few places I believe we have not upheld the church order in this entire working. First on page 127, we provide a summary of the decision that Rev Lanning erred (recommendation 1), but we do not give the entire summary of the decisions taken (rec 2 missing). We approved a motion to remind Rev. Lanning that his work must come first with ground 2 that says that if Rev Lanning’s work suffers because he is editor, he should resign. I understand that to mean we approved of him being editor. Now, let’s move to the next meeting where we ask Rev Lanning to resign

(page 136, ground 2). In grounds 2 we report that Rev Lanning has **not been given approval**. But that is not entirely true. Article 30 along with Article 46 tells us this – ecclesiastical matters only shall be transacted in ecclesiastical manner, and matters shall not be treated again unless a revision is deemed necessary. In asking Rev. Lanning to resign with that ground, we violated our own decision that we had taken earlier in the year. To make matters worse, we made this decision public. We publicly said to the entire congregation, Rev. Lanning has not been given approval (page 136, grounds 2). That is a serious oversight on our part, that makes our decision at the very least misleading.

Which brings us to the second time we have not adhered to the church order in the Sword and Shield decision. We used one Bible passage to defend this decision. I wonder brothers, did we understand the context of what we wrote in grounds 1? To use Jer. 23:4 as the grounds for our decision, and then to distribute that to the congregation, is to leave the implication, based on the context of that verse, that if Rev. Lanning continues as editor, he is scattering the flock. That Rev. Lanning, while continuing as an editor, is a false prophet scattering the sheep. And thus, he must resign so God can set him up as a shepherd again to feed the flock. Brothers, I would consider that a gross public sin, to be a false prophet scattering the sheep. Why was Rev. Lanning not pulled off the pulpit right then and there? That would be a violation of Article 79, which calls for him to be suspended immediately.

Okay – so back to page 127 – Rev Lanning preaches a sermon on Jeremiah 23. After having read the minutes about the S&S, I view it this way. The consistory made a public charge against Rev Lanning by using that passage – that he is scattering the flock through his work as editor on the sword and shield. And therefore, Rev Lanning preached a sermon on that passage, to make sure the entire congregation fully understood the meaning of that passage that was already made public. Here we are brought to Article 55 (read now). We had voted to call Rev. Lanning’s work as the editor of S&S a work that was scattering the flock. If Rev. Lanning believed his work was the work of the Word of God in the S&S, then to ask him to step down would be an error. It would be a silencing of the truth, an error. Article 55 calls for him to speak out against that error.

Next, we called for a meeting to ask for Church Visitors advice on the sermon and the decision to ask Rev Lanning to resign as editor. I want to dwell on that for a minute. We made a **decision** – Article 31 calls for that decision to be settled and binding. Why would we need advice on a settled and binding decision? How could we possibly ask for advice, and I’m assuming now here, as the decision was so soon removed, that we didn’t deal with a single protest that we already had? Article 31 is given to maintain order in the church. We ought to have dealt with the protests. Perhaps the protests contained something that would change our mind on the editor decision, and then also open our eyes about the validity of that sermon. But no, we chose to throw Article 31 away and called in the church visitors. Brothers, that is like saying to your protestants, we value the church visitor’s words over our own flock. We “lord” the church visitor’s authority over that of the office of all believer. (read article 84 here)

Next, let us we consider the advice that the church visitors have presented, they speak a lot of Article 31, 74, 75, 79 and 80. But there is one article that is glaringly missing. Article 55 is not answered, or even considered in the advice. Was Rev. Lanning’s sermon a fulfillment of the Article? This article calls him to “ward off false doctrine **and errors** that multiply exceedingly through heretical writings, the ministers (and elders) shall use the means of teaching” and here is the critically important section of this article “shall use the means of teaching, **of refutation or warning, and of ADMONITION**, as well in the ministry of the Word.” They speak of all the sweeping charges Rev. Lanning makes against all the office bearers in the PRC. Well let’s consider other preaching. Our ministers often bringing sweeping charges against the CRC of common grace. They often bring sweeping charges against denominations who hold

to Federal Vision. Ought not they to have followed the church orderly way of bringing charges against those denominations, rather than taking the pulpit to preach against them? Is that not schismatic against the greater body of Christ to speak of the errors of other denominations? I'm sure we believe there are believers in those denomination. How in the world will those believers ever come to the understanding of the truth found in the PRC if we continue to speak out against them so schismatically? To speak against them is to bring schism to the universal church of Christ. Rev. Lanning brought no personal charges of sin against one man or one body. He stuck to the decisions and doctrines that have been taught by the PRC. So, we have this: by ignoring Article 55, the church visitor's advice does not consider that by taking Rev. Lanning off the pulpit, we may be violating Article 55.

Further, let us go to the letter that they advised us to bring to the congregation. Well, before that, let's read the motion they presented to you "to immediately to suspend its pastor." Then they ask you to relieve Rev. Lanning of his duties in another motion. Brothers, suspending Rev. Lanning is suspending him. Why would you need to relieve of his duties as well? What's the reason behind that? Is there somewhere in the church order that defends that? The information brought to the congregation ought to have been this "the consistory has moved to suspend Rev. Lanning and is seeking the judgement of another consistory in the matter." Everyone in our church knew that by seeking the advice of a neighboring consistory, you had already suspended Rev. Lanning. To then announce that he was relieved, and that alone, while you deliberated on the church visitor's advice could be perceived as deceptive. The congregation was left under the impression that we were still deliberating on whether or not to suspend Rev. Lanning. I wonder, what is the motive behind hiding that information? Was the reason for announcing that a deliberate deception? Was the intent to misdirect the congregation for a time? I doubt we will find anything in the church order that points to a misleading of a congregation as the wise and true path of office bearers.

And in the interest of length, I am going to conclude my analysis of the Classis agenda and the church order here. In a short summary of these last few minutes, here are a list of the articles we may have violated in our work so far (in the first 3 pages of the materials)

1. Article 30
2. Article 46
3. Articles 79 and 80
4. Article 55
5. Article 31
6. Article 84

Here is where we come, again, to the absolute heart of the matter, and I have alluded to it before I dove into my section about the church order. You men have an answer to every one of my assertions about the church order. In fact, as I was preparing, I read my speech back to myself and I actually have an answer for all 6 assertions I brought to you. I could write your defense to me for you. I don't believe that my interpretation of the church order is better than what a consistory can understand. And in fact, if I leave and you men discuss even one of the assertions I have made about the church order, then I have not made the one point I wish to make tonight.

The only reason I brought my views of the church order,(I wonder if you men caught it) is to show there is one thing missing out of all 6 of my assertions. That one thing that is missing is the Word of God. There is no Scripture to back up any of my claims. And why do I have an answer to every one of your assertions about the church order? Why do I stand before you disagreeing with so much of this decision? Because Scripture is eerily silent in all these documents. Why can I so vehemently disagree with these documents? Because Scripture was not set forth. I cannot argue with Scripture, but

Scripture is not the foundation of your decision. The foundation of all of this is man's understanding of the church order.

This brings us back to early on where we established the church order is a minor creed. I remind us now that means it is a creed only in the place that it sets forth the practical applications of the truths of Scripture. This is the heart of this matter and is why I am glad we have it set forth on page 1 of these documents. Brothers, by never adhering to what the Bible says about Rev. Lanning's actions, or to what Scripture says about the Jeremiah sermon, we stand today on **our interpretation** of the church order. We stand on the interpretation and wisdom of men. We stand on the interpretation of men of an interpretation of men of the Scripture. We are two interpretations removed from the Word of God. The more we interpret, the farther we get from the Truths found in Scripture – and the closer we get to **only** the wisdom and understanding of men. Let's read a couple passages about the wisdom and understanding of men: Colossians 2:18, Jeremiah 8: 8-9, 1 Corinthians 3:18-21, Proverbs 14:12, Colossians 3:16.

Brothers, if we had treated that sermon as out of harmony with the Word of God, and proved it from the Scriptures, I would not be before you today. I would not believe that my elders have chosen to ignore the Word of God. By standing not on the Word of God, but on our wisdom and understanding, those passages convict us. We stand in direct contradiction to those passages. Those passages tell us this: to stand firm on the wisdom is men, is to stand in contradiction to the Word of God, and that is what I bring to you tonight.

So, what am I asking of you men tonight? I ask this: search your hearts. Why did you adopt this decision with the Word of God missing from it? What were your motives? Was it a true holiness where you wished to defend the Word of God? Was it a desire to defend and uphold the truth? Or was it anger against Rev. Lanning and his actions. Was it the idea that Rev. Lanning has had an agenda, and you do not like that agenda? Was it the motive that you must get Rev. Lanning to stop talking about that agenda and will use any means necessary to silence him? I cannot pretend to search your hearts for you. Only God can know your hearts. So, I lay this out before God and you men. Search your hearts. Search God's Word for the answer and stand on that answer.

And I leave you with this truth: After you search your hearts and God's Word, if that answer is still that Rev. Lanning needs to be deposed, then in that we will have peace and unity in the church once again. I will repent of telling you that it is wrong. If Rev. Lanning is a true child of God, he will repent as well. And that would bring a peace and unity in God's Word, and not in men's understanding and wisdom.

I thank you men for your time and attention.

In Christ,

Deacon Keith Gritters

