

Dear Brothers,

Greetings of the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,

I am writing you to protest the consistory's decision taken on November 28, 2020 to "immediately suspend its pastor, Rev. Lanning, according to Articles 79 and 80 of the Church Order for the sin of public schism committed in his sermon on Jeremiah 23:4&14 preached on November 15, 2020." I ask the consistory to take the necessary steps to lift Rev. Lanning's suspension and to restore the faithful prophet of God to his office as the pastor in Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church.

Grounds:

1. Rev. Lanning's Jeremiah 23: 4&14 sermon was in harmony with Article 55 of the church order which states "To ward off false doctrines and errors that multiply exceedingly through heretical writings, the minister 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."
 - a. Article 55 is a creedal section of the church order as it sets forth the truths of Scripture found in the following passages
 - i. Isaiah 58: 1.
 - ii. II Timothy 4:1-4.
 - iii. Ezekiel 3:15-21.
 - iv. Ezekiel 33: 1-9.
 - v. Acts 20: 28-32.
 - vi. Titus 1:9
 - b. The consistory had adopted and made public a decision to ask Rev. Lanning to resign as editor of the Sword and Shield. In that decision, grounds 1, the consistory states "BCPRC's congregation is in a fragile state." The proof text for grounds 1 is Jeremiah 23:4, with no further explanation. The context of that verse is God will set up shepherds over against the false prophets who scattered the sheep in the land. This leaves the implication that if Rev. Lanning were to continue his work as editor, he would be a false prophet who was allowing the "fragile" flock to be scattered.
 - c. To leave the implication that a minister of the Word is a false prophet is a serious implication. One that calls for the Word of God to answer that implication immediately, lest the flock to be scattered by that decision if it was in error (I use error to mean not being in harmony with God's Word in the confessions). Ezekiel 33: 3 says "If when he (the watchman) seeth the sword come upon the land, **he blow the trumpet** and warn the people." The Word of God does not say "he checketh with the king or the elders in the gate if it is alright to blow the trumpet." The Word of God binds Rev. Lanning to warn God's people immediately.
 - d. Rev. Lanning is called to warn the flock, lest the blood of God's people be "required at the watchman's hand." Ezekiel 33: 8 "When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand." Verse 11 clarifies who the "wicked" in verse 8 are. They are the house of Israel, the OT

church. Therefore, the wicked can be understood as the children of God who are living in sin.

- e. The PRC is in the midst of a doctrinal controversy, and the Sword and Shield is one place that consistently attempts to sound the trumpet against that error, and this decision would silence that trumpet that cried out as a watchman on the walls of Zion.
 - f. Rev Lanning therefore was called to bring the very Word of Christ, according the biblical principles of Article 55, against that decision.
2. Rev. Lanning does not violate Article 31, Article 74, and 75 as suggested.
 - a. Grounds i (church visitor advice, recommendation 1) speaks of Rev. Lanning bringing charges of sin against office-bearers of the PRC from the pulpit rather than to their consistories. Rev. Lanning never brought specific charges of sin against any office-bearer. He only speaks of the errors that the PRC corporately has been committing over the past few years. (see church visitor's letter of advice)
 - b. By never speaking any specific names in the sermon, Rev. Lanning did not bring any charges against any specific office bearer. Any feeling as though it is a charge against an individual is the call to repentance of the gospel pricking the men's hearts, and not due to the specificity of Rev. Lanning's charges. Acts 2: 37-38 shows the one possible effect of a call to repentance, "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." Acts 5: 33 speaks of the other effect of the call of the gospel to repentance "When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them [the apostles]."
 - c. Therefore, he did not violate Article 74 and 75, and did not need to bring any charges to a specific consistory.
 3. Rev. Lanning also did not militate against Classis or his consistory in Article 31
 - a. He simply focused on the dangerous attitude presented from decisions that have already been overturned by Synod 2018.
 - b. See grounds 2. b. above. He then proved there was a public minimization of the error by referring to the public writings of men, which truth and candor obligated him to do.
 4. Rev. Lanning did not violate his Formula of Subscription vow
 - a. This sermon was nothing different than what we have heard multiple times from Rev. Lanning off the pulpit. This was not his first public preaching or writing against the errors in the PRC
 - b. In order to violate his vow, he would've had to preach against a settled and binding decision of Classis or Synod, but he limited the preaching to condemning already overturned decisions and upholding Synod 2018.
 - c. He did not preach against his consistory in any explicit manner. He never spoke against any of their decisions. As states in 2. b. any pricking or hardening of the hearts was the call of the gospel to repentance, and not the sins of man.

5. To bring this decision to its end will mean the end of calls to repentance in the Protestant Reformed Churches.
 - a. Justified unto Liberty, page 174, 1st full paragraph, Prof Hanko speaks about Paul's rebuke in Galatians 3:1 "O Foolish Galatians who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eye Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?" Here he states: "Third the unusual expression is a powerful description of the preaching of the gospel wherever and whenever it is proclaimed. A minister is called by Christ to preach as an ambassador of Christ. Yet Christ himself preaches in a very real sense, though it be through an ordained minister. When the gospel is proclaimed, Christ's voice is heard. This is clearly the teaching of Romans 10:13-15 and of John 10:3 where Jesus says that his sheep hear the voice of Christ. The meaning of Galatians 3:1 is therefore that in the preaching of the gospel, all who hear are confronted with Christ himself. They are, as it were, face-to-face with Christ who was crucified and in whom alone is found salvation. They are confronted with the question that they cannot escape no matter how hard they try: "What are you going to do with Christ."
 - b. If Rev. Lanning's sermon was a rebuke, direct from the word of Christ and in harmony with the biblical principles set forth in Article 55, then we have labeled the very words of Christ as schismatic. This is not about the words of Rev. Lanning, but about the Words of Christ, spoken through His ordained minister, and whether those words can be schismatic.
 - c. Rev. Lanning's sermon must be proved to be out of harmony with the Word of God, otherwise it is a fulfillment of not only Article 55, but the Bible's call to preachers to preach repentance to the people of God.
 - i. Rev. Lanning's sermon was never proved to be out of harmony with the Word of God
 - ii. Rev. Lanning faithfully exegeted and applied the text to the situation
 - d. The implication of this decision is then, that regardless of whether a sermon is the Word of God, if it pricks a man, then he may call that sermon in violation of Article 74 and 75 and call for the minister's repentance for bringing the rebukes of God's Word, by calling that rebuke in the sermon schismatic.

I pray for the wisdom of God's Word for you men as you deliberate this protest, and may we come to proper Biblical resolution in this matter.

In Christ,

Keith Gritters